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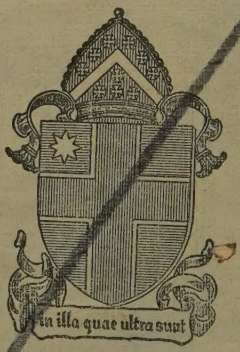


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**Mozley, J. B. (James Bowling), 1813-1878**
Sermons, parochial and occasional

# SERMONS

## Parochial and Occasional

BY

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LATE CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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# Advertisement.

In arranging the following Sermons for the press, it has been thought right to place them in chronological order rather than with regard to their subjects. Those that come first in the volume were written before the Author had a parish. Many that follow were evidently designed for a village congregation, while others make larger demands on the reader's attention. All, it is believed, will be found characteristic of the writer's turn of mind and original way of viewing things.

It is felt that the Sermons lose much in wanting the Author's revision for the press. Nothing was less in his mind than their publication. Missing this great advantage, the Editor has preferred to leave some homelinesses of expression, which the Author would not have allowed to pass, rather than substitute for the first draught of a characteristic thought the conventional phrases which suggest themselves in their place.

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*SERMON I.*

# The Right Eye and the Right Hand.

"*And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*"—MATTHEW v. 29, 30.

THIS is one of those texts which the mass of mankind, if they would confess it, feel rather as a blow when they read it. They feel it as a text which it would be disagreeable to them to think much of. They feel disposed to pass it over with the general hope that they will never act directly contrary to it, avoiding any direct consideration of what it claims from them. It is not every text of Scripture which has the same searching power, and operates so as a touchstone upon people's wills. Some texts are more of this character than others; some are more feared, and therefore more avoided than others. I will say generally that whenever this is felt with respect to any text of Scripture; that is to say, whenever men are conscious or half conscious, as they often are, that they want to pass over any particular text, and are glad

when it goes out of their heads, and trust with a sensible feeling of relief to the course of daily affairs in which they are engaged superseding it and removing it from their practical recollection,—that the text in question is one particularly likely to be of service to them; and, in fact, particularly meant for them. For men generally know when they are touched, and when a real demand is made upon them.

The reason why this text produces such an impression is very evident; and I will state it in the first place, because to do so will be simply to bring out the general meaning and force of the text itself.

First, then, this text suggests the general idea of having to make definite, distinct, and sometimes even sudden and sharp sacrifices for the sake of religion. Now men are not often called upon to make the most painful kind of sacrifices for the sake of religion; and therefore so far the text is relieved of its disturbing powers; but it is at the same time trying to persons to think that they may have such sacrifices to make some day; that such a thing is possible; and that if it is possible, they should be in a state of mind to make them, supposing they *should* be called upon. For we like an easy and comfortable prospect before us, as well as a comfortable present; and this prospect, though not actually taken from us, is somewhat modified by this thought, and we feel the solidity and permanency of our world here to be somewhat shaken. "I said, I shall never be removed; Thou, Lord, of Thy goodness hast made my hill so strong." This is the certainty we like to feel, but for which the psalmist says im-

mediately afterwards he was rebuked, and shown his mistake. "Thou didst turn Thy face from me, and I was troubled."* This sort of certainty and confidence then, in any existing state of comfort and convenience, is touched by the text, and there is an interference with it. Men like to consider that the future has not any additions and new things in store for them in the way of self-sacrifice. They are conscious perhaps of a certain amount of sacrifice which they have made, and now regularly make; they are more or less used to this state of things, and like the thought of just this—or something like this—mixture of duty and enjoyment, sacrifices and comforts, going on to the end. The text, in answer to this, does not make any prophecy; it does not say that they will go on; it does not say that they will not; but it fixes on the mind the general impression very forcibly of the possibility of new trials and of new efforts, and perhaps even sudden, and perhaps even violent sacrifices having to be made—the plucking out of a right eye, or the cutting off of a right hand.

But this is not, after all, the main account of the peculiar significance and formidableness of the text; for this reason is mainly connected with the future, and is concerned with possibilities, whereas it is not necessary to go to the future or to possibilities to discover the peculiar application of this text, and the reason of its force. Indeed, from the wording we see at once that its main bearing is upon the present; for it refers to something present which we are supposed to know, and to consider and observe, before we do

* Psalm xxx. 7.

what the text tells us to do about it. "If thy right eye offend thee," it says, and "if thy right hand offend thee;" that is to say, "*now;* if they offend thee now," the time is present—the thing to occasion the act, and calling for the treatment, exists now.

If general experience has established any truth satisfactorily with respect to human minds, it has this—that all have their weak points. This is the common and popular language in which the truth is expressed. Scripture uses graver and sadder words, and speaks of "the sin which doth so easily beset us;" that is to say, all persons have some weakness or sin, which, from the constitution of their minds, is particularly alluring and captivating; more so than any others are to them. They may have no great taste for, and may be able easily to resist, other sins and temptations to which some give way; but this one has a congeniality in it. It addresses itself to them with peculiar force and effect; it lays hold upon them, and they give way to and humour it. A great number of sins and evil tendencies which belong to our nature in general may lie almost dead and powerless in a mind, while this one sin is a living one, which draws and allures, which pleases and delights. This one sin is to the man the whole world of sin, and makes him a transgressor of the whole law; as St. James says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill."* It can never be too much dwelt upon that all human souls in this world are in a diseased state;

* James ii. 10, 11.

that they have that radical complaint in them which issues in a particular plague or sore part somewhere—some part where they are morbidly tender and exposed to the attack of the tempter. Where this tender and sore and corrupt part is, is the besetting sin. If the rest is tolerably sound, this one part is quite enough to bring the soul under the dominion of sin. It is not necessary that this besetting sin should be always the same one throughout life; sometimes it may be, sometimes it may not. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and the evil in it has a remarkable power of change and adaptation; it is flexible and pliant and insinuating. There can be one besetting sin at one time of life, and that may gradually subside and another gradually rise. After succeeding in overcoming one particular sin by efforts of the conscience and will, we are not secure from being drawn within the attraction even of a worse than that we have escaped from. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house, whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."* It may be the same sin then, or it may be a different one; but there is sure to be some favourite sin or weakness attaching to every part of life. It may be added that men are generally, or may easily be,

* Matt. xii. 43–45.

tolerably aware what these sins and weaknesses are. In fact, they have often far more knowledge of them than they would like to confess to others, or even to themselves. It is not indeed very difficult to find them out; they make themselves known by such very plain and clear tokens. When men feel themselves eager, anxious, longing, easily disturbed, unable to be resigned with respect to any subject of desire; when anything excites and nothing satisfies them; when the least thing suggests the one subject of their desire to them, and the least falling short of expectation depresses them—this whole state of mind, in all its degrees, shows the besetting weakness or sin.

Now, with respect to such a sin, the text entirely sets itself against just that temper of mind which, of all others, men are most fond of putting themselves into. For the position which men put themselves most commonly into, when they first experience the attacks of a particular temptation, is a kind of midway one. They do not rush immediately into sin, and they do not put themselves out of reach of it either. The sin has sufficient charms for them, to make them unwilling to cut themselves off from all chance of ultimately indulging it; and at the same time they do not venture actually and at once upon it. So they tamper with their desire, and play with the temptation. They indulge in approximations and foretastes; they enjoy being near the sinful object, and having it in their power to enjoy it, as if to be near it were next to the enjoyment of it in respect of pleasure, while it avoided the guilt; and as if the preliminaries of sin could be reposed in, and

the freedom of innocence be retained at the same time. There are several Scripture examples of this state of mind. Thus Ahab at first tampered with his covetous desire for Naboth's vineyard. He would not seize it at once, and he would not give up the thought of it. "And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread."* Thus Saul divided his heart between the commands of God on the one side, and his own pride and the popular voice on the other. Thus Balaam divided himself between the fear of God and respect for man, and wanted to do wrong with God's permission. Thus the disobedient prophet, lingering on his way back, was found by the prophet who lied to him, and suffered himself to believe that God had contradicted His first command. Thus Pilate wanted to be just and the condemner of the Just One at the same time. Thus Ananias and Sapphira wanted to have all the religious satisfaction of giving their money away, and all the worldly satisfaction of keeping it. Scripture in various places warns us strongly against this midway and unsettled habit of mind, and urges decision as absolutely necessary to keep us out of evil. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."† And St. Paul says, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."‡ And to the Church

* 1 Kings xxi. 4. † Matt. vii. 24. ‡ Col. iii. 23.

of Laodicea it is said, in the Revelation, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth." But the text as a regular precept is directed straight in opposition to this habit of mind. "If thy right eye offend thee;" and, "If thy right hand offend thee." Offence in Scripture does not mean sin itself so much as something suggestive of it; something which puts sin in our way, and places us in imminent danger of giving way to it. In all such cases our Lord enjoins a decided line upon men, in contrast with this favourite midway and undecided one. The text stands in most direct and uncompromising opposition to what is just the most cherished attitude of the human mind toward sin. It tells us not to suppose that we can encourage ourselves in approximations to any special indulgence to which we are drawn, and have none of the sin of it. All such approaches to and tamperings with sin, are sin, and they enervate and corrupt the mind, destroy its simplicity and singleness, and withdraw it from God.

Such is the general force and meaning of the text, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: and if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee." And now I will make one or two remarks as to the mode in which it may be applied, and how far it is within our ordinary reach of obedience in actual life.

In the first place then, with respect to the extraordinary class of sacrifices for the sake of religion and

our own souls, very little can be said. They do not come often, and when they come, little more can be said than that the man has to make his choice between one or other of two courses, and that if he has sufficient strength of will he will take the right one. It sometimes happens that men have suddenly to choose between giving up all their prospects in life, and all their position in the world; between, as the Scripture expresses it, hating "father, and mother, and wife, and children, . . . yea, and his own life also," and retaining their worldly position at the expense of their own souls. Of such cases it is not easy to say much.

But with respect to the way in which the text must be supposed to operate in ordinary life, I will remark first, then, that this text implies that men have some knowledge of themselves; and observe their own weaknesses and the bad tendencies of their minds. This is the first and preliminary thing which is supposed, because it is obviously useless that we should be told to pluck out our right eye if it offends us, and cut off our right hand if it offends us, if we are wholly ignorant when our right hand and when our right eye *do* offend us. It is of no advantage to us to be told how to act in danger, if we do not know where danger is; and therefore to be the disciples of this text at all, we must have some acquaintance with our hearts in the first place, and know in what parts we are exposed and weak. It supposes that we have noted our falls, and remember on what points we have given way, and that we are able to foresee where we shall be most likely to give way again. This is a kind of knowledge of, and a

kind of relation to, themselves which is strange to many, who forget that they should reason with respect to themselves in the same way that they would reason in the case of other things; and that just as in other cases they reason from what has taken place to what is likely to take place again, and would think a person insane or infatuated who did not reason in this way; in such and in no other way they should reason about themselves and their own minds; should infer that if they have given way to sin on a particular point several times before, they will be likely to give way again. For men fall into the habit of looking upon everything connected with their own souls as matter of chance, as if there were no law or order, and therefore no reasoning and no calculation with respect to them. Thus they may have fallen into sin, perhaps, again and again on a particular point; and it will not occur to them that they do not stand quite as good a chance of standing their ground on that same point the next time they are tried, as if they had never been tried and never failed before.

This knowledge of ourselves and our own weaknesses to some extent being supposed, it follows next that we are to cut ourselves off as strongly and decidedly as possible from all avenues and approaches to those particular sins. We are to keep ourselves carefully out of the way of temptation. The text is in harmony with the petition in the Lord's prayer—"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." And this may be done in two ways, one of which is much more constantly in our power, and may be made much more

a part of the regular daily discipline of life, than the other. We may indeed, and it is our duty sometimes positively and designedly to avoid meeting particular temptations which come in the course of things; and intentionally not to enter upon scenes, or go into places, or undertake any work, or enter upon any line of life, or form any connections, which may expose us to temptation on the points on which we feel ourselves weak; and this is one mode of not putting ourselves in the way of temptation. But it is not always in our power to adopt this mode; for we may be obliged often to go into scenes and enter upon lines of occupation where such temptations do occur. But one mode of not putting ourselves in the way of temptation is always in our power, and is always ready at hand, and may be kept to constantly and be a part of the continual discipline of life; and that is, not courting temptation. I believe that if men honestly did this, and this only; if they simply in this negative and passive way kept themselves out of temptation, it would go very far towards fulfilling the precept of the text. For after all it is not the temptations which meet men, but the temptations which they go to meet, which they purposely find out, and use all kinds of art and management and subtlety to put themselves in the way of, which do the great mischief in moral and spiritual things. So far from its being the inference which men naturally draw from the fact of their being weak and exposed in any particular direction, that they should guard themselves in that direction, they seem on the contrary, very commonly to choose that particular direction in which to expose

themselves to the tempter. They indulge in all half-gratifications of it, and encourage the approach of anything that can flatter and stimulate that unsound part of their souls without absolutely all at once indulging it to the extent of definite sin; they contrive opportunities, and use adroitness and art in setting things in a train which will bring them within reach of their favourite sin or passion. They are not content to let events go their own way, and take what opportunities they would ordinarily bring with them; but they try to give a turn perpetually to the course of things around them, and just direct it to that quarter where they know the opportunity is likely to lie. And they use much art and deceit with themselves in such management, and make themselves think that they are following a course of events as it takes them, and perhaps make themselves think even that they are sorry it is taking them in such a direction, and that they would turn it in another if they could, and that they are the victims of circumstances over which they have no control, when all the time they are really diverting things around them from their natural course into another, and purposely turning them in the direction of the special and besetting sin. Against this deceitful and subtle way of courting temptation the text does loudly and sternly warn us. It tells us indeed that we may sometimes have to make great sacrifices, and sometimes have to cut ourselves off from natural opportunities; but it also tells us that there is one thing which we may always do, and that is, not create temptations and provoke opportunities. It is these

temptations which men create, and these opportunities which they provoke, which are the great prompters to sin. Very few even of those regular scenes of temptation which the world presents would have half the power they have, were it not for that voluntary heightening and addition of power which we give them ourselves, when we are in them. "Keep thy heart" then, says the Scripture, "with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. . . . Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."* "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness."† This is that path that we read so much of throughout Scripture, and which we read of in Psalm cxix.: "Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments. . . . . Turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way." "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: to deliver thee from the way of the evil man . . . whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths . . . that thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it."‡

* Prov. iv. 23, 25. † Matt. vi. 22, 23. ‡ Prov. ii. 10, 21.

*SERMON II.*

# Temptation treated as Opportunity.

"*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.*"—JAMES i. 12.

THE difference between what people profess and what they really think and do, as it is the first thought almost that strikes us in connection with the subject of temptations, is the one also that sets the real truth of the matter most clearly and forcibly before us. We find out here, as we often do in other things, what is the real state of the case, by opposing it to the vague, careless, and false impressions which we too commonly entertain with respect to it.

It is part of our belief and our creed, as Christians and believers in the Bible, to think that the world is full of temptations. The Scriptures tell us this from one end to the other. We pray against being led into temptation, in the Lord's prayer, as if our path through life was in the natural course of things to be expected to be full of them, and it was a special blessing from God to be saved from encountering them. We know that the devil "walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," and that we are to be steadfast in the faith, and to resist him. We hear that "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation;"* and "Blessed is the man that

* 2 Peter ii. 9.

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endureth temptation," says St. James in the text; and also, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." And of our Saviour it is said that He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Such is the aspect in which the world is put before us in the Bible. It is not put before us as a place in which things go on harmoniously, and the pleasures and excitement of which are naturally adapted to and designed for us, and to be used accordingly. You know the easy feeling we have when we go into any circle of friends or acquaintances met for amusement; when we find ourselves in any scene of ordinary quiet gaiety and enjoyment. We feel as if the whole scene were most completely suited to us, and made for us, and as if we had nothing to do but to receive the impressions which it conveyed to our minds as they came, and join in and aid the genial feeling, the flow of spirits, that animate the scene. There is a great sense of security, I say, felt in such scenes, a feeling of home and harmlessness, a feeling that we may safely join in the excitements that go on around us, from the fact that they are there and before us. To be on our guard to mistrust appearances, and to hesitate before we accept and yield to them, seems a line of behaviour not necessary, and wholly out of place.

Now this sort of feeling, whether right or wrong with respect to these particular scenes (for I only use it as an illustration), is just not the feeling that we are told to have with respect to the world. There is not this harmony and congeniality supposed in the Scriptures between the world and ourselves. On the con-

trary, we are told to mistrust appearances that come before us, and to hold aloof from objects which the world presents to us. So far from relying upon the innocence and propriety of things which the world daily and hourly places before us, from the fact that it does so place them before us, there is a perpetual resistance supposed on our part to these constantly presented, common, well-known objects of attraction. Of sights that meet our eyes, and pleasures that our senses encounter, and modes that present themselves of rising in the world, getting honour and the like, of a great crowd of appeals of this sort that we meet with, it may be said that we have positively nothing to do with them except to resist them; and this it is which constitutes our course of temptation in the world. We have not to yield, not to accept, not to enjoy things which offer themselves for the very purpose apparently of being yielded to, accepted, enjoyed. There is a spirit of contradiction, if we may call it so, which composes the very relation in which the Christian stands to the system of the world, and the two fulfil their mutual parts and offices to each other in God's scheme, not by their harmony, but by their jarring discord. This is the thorny path we hear of, and the narrow and rough way; for the pleasures the world offers, if not yielded to, are for the time so many pricks and stings, and there is no medium between their being relished and enjoyed, and their positively paining us; the fact of their presence being itself painful, if we do not allow ourselves to enjoy them.

Such is the meaning of what we call temptation.

The Bible tells us, and as Christians we believe, that there is a regular course of these temptations for us in this life, that there are a number of objects and wishes constantly presenting themselves to us in the natural course of things here, that we should not give way to but resist, although they do present themselves. But what is the real view which men take of this subject; the real view, I mean, as distinguished from the formal religious view which they are bound to take as Christians? What is the view which, judging from their practice, men seem to take? We see a vast number in the world who, apparently, never resist any occasion whatever that presents itself of doing what is agreeable to them, and making themselves happy for the time being; who seem practically to believe that there are no such things as temptations in the world at all. They never resist any invitations from the world, and therefore they cannot, to be consistent, think that any of these are temptations. What religion calls temptations, they simply consider opportunities, occasions which come to hand for doing something which is pleasing to them. The fact that they have such opportunities before them is a sufficient warrant to make use of them. They seem as if they reasoned on the subject, and thought that because the world brought such opportunities before them, they were meant and designed to be enjoyed by them. And so they fall in with everything, and allow themselves to be at cross purposes with no train of pleasures or excitement they find going on. They take things as they are, and catch readily at what comes to them. The world flows on and they join in the stream. They

want pleasure, and the world has it to give, and these two facts quite fit in together and form their view—a very simple and complete one in its way—of the present state of things. According to this view, I say, there are no such things as temptations in the world; everything is meant to be given way to. What should be called temptations are considered simply natural openings; avenues to pleasure and advantage; calls which it is part of our state and condition here to comply with.

When any bad way of thinking is drawn out to the full, as I am trying now to do, it is apt to appear over stated. I do not mean, however, to say that there are any persons who really and systematically think that there are no such things as temptations in life. This would be too absurd for any one calling himself a Christian to assert; but I do say that a great number take temptations so extremely easily, give themselves so little trouble to withstand them, and are overpowered by them so much as a matter of course, that they can hardly be supposed to consider them temptations at all. They never take in, even in thought, that primary elementary notion of a temptation as a thing to be resisted. They have not an honest, downright belief on this point. When a temptation comes across them this is not the first idea that occurs to them about it; on the contrary, this idea is lost sight of in the fact that the pleasure is present, and is captivating them. In the haze and twilight of their senses they think themselves rather drawn and persuaded than tempted, and they follow the lead.

How very different this easy way of looking upon temptation from the severe, penetrating, decisive view which the Bible takes! Scripture is sharp and mistrustful about every thing which the world offers. "Distrust everything," it would seem to say, "till it is proved to be safe. Think everything dangerous and deceitful. Be on your guard. This is not a place in which you can trust appearances, and commit yourself to circumstances. Do not rest upon any object because it offers itself to you; do not be drawn along by an influence because it would pull you after it. The object was put before you in order that you might not rest your eye on it; the wish was suffered to be in you in order that you might not carry it out. The world within you and the world without are evil, and they are placed in you and near you in order that you may have nothing to do with them; in order that, by having nothing to do with them, though they are so near, you may gain a more entire and remote distance from them."

For example, Scripture says, "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."* The various tempting qualities and refined attractions of the wine are dwelt upon in the description, and expressed to the very full on purpose to raise and enforce doubly and trebly the idea of resistance to them. The description is one which suits equally the voice of Scripture and that of the profligate man;

* Prov. xxiii. 31, 32.

but the one says, "The wine is sweet, and I will drink it;" the other, "It is sweet, and therefore be afraid of it." All the charms and pleasant features of the cup of pleasure here described are, one by one, so many natural calls upon him in the idea of the easy, self-indulgent man. They are so many simple invitations to him, which he really sees no reason for not accepting; so many plain hints and gentle insinuating persuasions from nature to him. He cannot help their being before him; and being before him, he passively acquiesces in the power which that presence of theirs gives them over him. Scripture says, on the other hand, "True, they are before you; but do not infer from that fact that you are invited simply, but that you are tempted. Consider it solely as a temptation; take no other view of it. Let that be the first thought that strikes you. As soon as you see it, say, 'I am tempted. This thing before me is an enemy in disguise, and a snake in the grass. It is an enticement, only it makes a pleasant show; not at all for my sake, or out of benevolence to me, but merely to entice me.'" "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."

So again Scripture says, "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field."* This is just putting such transactions in the very light, of all others, in which men of the world look at them when they engage in them. Men add one house to another, and one field to another, and one sum of money to another. Because they have lands, and because they have money, it seems to them only the proper conse-

* Isaiah v. 8.

quence of their situation that they should have more lands and more money. That they have something is the reason why they should have more. Progress and increase make so natural and congenial a prospect to our mind when a beginning is once made. This is the very point of the temptation to which men of property are subject. Poor men are not so liable to fall into it, because they have nothing upon which the temptation can take its stand in the first instance. They do not know the wish to amass money, because they have no money to begin with; they have no heap to add to and enlarge; they have nothing on which to build a fortune and commence an advance in the world. Rich men feel the temptation because they are rich. They like going on adding and adding, and making a moderate fortune large, a large one larger. The process of addition and increase is the enjoyment to them. It commends itself from its extreme naturalness, and seems to bear the evidence of its propriety and reasonableness in this very circumstance.

Scripture, then, attacks the man of property on this very ground. It tells him that the very circumstance which he considers only a call and invitation to him to get rich is a temptation, and a temptation only; that it is no call of Providence, and that it is no invitation whatever to him, except as being an invitation to be resisted. Scripture tells him that he must not consider, because such and such a course of proceeding wonderfully suits his position, and fits in with his state of mind, that therefore he must fall in with it. On the contrary, that very suitableness, that very fitness, that

most admirable congeniality with his views and wishes, is in the Divine scheme placed before his eyes for the sole purpose that it may be withstood. As the wine looked red, and moved itself aright, and gave his colour in the cup, solely that the beholders might resist such beautiful colour and such winning motion; so the lands look large, and the estate widens, and field after field extends the prospect, and the rich man's eye sees its treasure expanding on the completest and most natural pattern of growth and increase, for the very purpose that this aspect of things might not take him along with it, and that he might not allow this specious idea of growth and advance to gain upon him.

Or to take another instance, what an extraordinary call does facility of speech seem to be, to persons who possess it, to exercise it on all occasions in which it is capable of being exercised! Undoubtedly in one point of view the tongue, with that admirable readiness which it has for expressing immediately the mind's thoughts as soon as ever conceived, does seem authoritatively to suggest its use whenever any thought or opinion about any person or thing occurs. The fluent person under such circumstances seems to himself to have the whole argument of final causes on his side, and urging him on. There is the thought or opinion on the one side, and there is undoubtedly a natural provision for expression on the other. The two are double one of another, and there is that perfect and beautiful adaptation which we observe in such innumerable instances in the general scheme of nature and Providence. It is evident indeed that this argument does

operate most powerfully, though perhaps instinctively, on the minds of persons who possess facility of speech. They do not see why, on each successive occasion when there is an opening for it, their gifts should not be exerted; and they seem to themselves at every such opening simply to reply to the call of circumstances and the designs of Providence; and accordingly many do exert this gift without proper limitation in a loose or impetuous way, saying on all occasions whatever comes into their minds, and letting no thought go unexpressed. Suppression appears at each successive time a case of contradicting the voice of nature, and the power of speech not used is felt to be a waste.

It is to be allowed that such a view, for I will call it such, though it is only instinctively held, like many other unsound ones has a foundation in truth. The fault of this view lies in what I have been noting all along; namely, that men do not take into account the system of probation or temptation in nature, as well as that of invitation and opportunity. The gift of the tongue is undoubtedly a call to mankind to use it, but a call to use it only for those purposes, and in that way and manner, which certain other considerations—to which as well as to the gift itself we are to attend—suggest and sanction. Where the gift comes into collision with these other considerations it is then not a call, but a temptation. It may appeal at the moment to the possessor of it with all the force of natural invitation. But that very naturalness is the temptation; that very persuasiveness it has as a ready and perfect instrument, in suggesting its own use, is then a tempting

persuasiveness permitted to act upon the mind in order that the mind may resist it, not in order that it may accept it. The use of the tongue is then the voluntary disuse of it; the end of the faculty of speech is intentional silence. It is evident that there cannot be the voluntary suspension of the gift except we have the gift. The presence of the gift is necessary for the trial of the will. The gift of the tongue resides in us for the purpose of producing this result of voluntary silence, as much as for that of producing voluntary speech.

Or, to take another instance, what a strong overpowering hold unsound religious views, whether of the intellectual or enthusiastic kind, take of minds they enter into. They see things only in one way. Their own view is so clear to themselves that they are surprised anybody can take any other. They are possessed by it, and it gives them the point of view at which they look at every object that meets them. True believers indeed feel also this pervading influence in their creed. It is part of their character that they should do so, and they have the firm assurance of faith in their system. But this deep feeling in them is a very different thing from the sharpening and emboldening assurance with which persons who have adopted a false system, intellectual or fanatical, think they see through everything, and seem to themselves to have in their minds the solution of all difficulties, and the key which makes everything in religion straight and plain. There is something particularly imposing, they say, in the great certainty and clearness which their views impart to

them, and they think this circumstance in itself an evidence of the truth of what they hold. Their new wisdom inspires them with a lightness and security of mind, and elevates them above the rank of ordinary believers, who have their difficulties and obstacles to contend with.

It is true—we must indeed believe it, for the fact is so visible—that there is something very soothing and exhilarating in the first occupation of the mind by an unsound religious system, from the very circumstance that it does seem so to clear up doubt, and to give such a sudden and easy insight into truth. False wisdom has her enticements; her "perfumes, myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon;" "her fine linen of Egypt." But should not the question sometimes occur whether this sudden insight, and this easy penetration and clearness, may not after all be a temptation and incitement on the part of false religion to get itself accepted? Men rush into it for the sake of this seeming illumination; but should not this illumination be itself a ground of suspicion to persons who must know, if they think at all, that they are not meet receptacles for such superior light? and that this exceeding clearness, if real and solid, must be far above them? Should not such light really have been mistrusted for the very characteristics on account of which it was caught at? and persons been afraid of that perfect satisfaction of mind because it professed to be such; and have suspected it must be hollow because it pretended so much? Were not the very characteristics which they regard as the evidences of their new wisdom, and direct calls to

adopt it, only temptations to be withstood? the very end for which they were put before them having been that their humility may be tried by their not giving way to them.

On the whole it depends entirely on the principle we have in our minds to begin with, whether we regard a number of impulses and incitements which surround us every day as calls to induce us, or as temptations to try us. In one way of looking at our state here the world is full of temptations; in another it has none. Whether the temptation be to pleasure, or to money getting, or to hasty speech, or to presumption, there are many who will never see it in any of these cases; that is to say, they see it, but they do not think of it as a temptation, but as an opportunity. It never occurs to them to take the contradictory side in the course of things here. They do not regard themselves as being in opposition to the world about them, but as being part of that world; and they chime in with their circumstances, with situations and impulses from within or without, as if they were meant to be acquiesced in, and as if this acquiescence was the end and purpose of such opportunities being given them.

If there is anything certain in Scripture, it is that we are in a state of warfare here. If we are at liberty to regard our temptations in the light which has been shown, then we are in a state of peace and acquiescence with the world, and not in a state of warfare with it. But Scripture says we are in a state of warfare, and we must act as if we were. We must take the

severer view of the invitations which we meet with in our course. We must look hostilely upon them, and take them at once for what they are—our foes and opponents—and then we shall have that succour which God has promised. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations."* "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape."† "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."

* 2 Peter ii. 9. † 1 Cor. x. 13.

*SERMON III.*

# The Influences of Habit on Devotion.

"*And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*"
—GENESIS xxviii. 16, 17.

THERE are few things perhaps for which Christians, who have a desire to do their duty, more reproach themselves than the small good they seem to get from going to church, compared with the good which they want to get, and which they would get if they were oftener in a proper state of mind. Certainly the time during which we are in a holy building, and joining in formal prayer, should have some solid, even some perceptible effect upon us. It is a time when we are taken out of our daily world. Everything around us reminds us of the reality of religion. We kneel ourselves; we see people kneeling. Kneeling is an undoubted sign, and a very awful one, that the world believes in a God. We see a large number of people brought together; we do not see the truth of religion then solely in an individual way, and in our own inward thoughts; but we see it as an actual fact which there is no denying. How wonderful, if we think for a moment, to see a whole con-

gregation kneeling, and bowing down. To Whom? To a Being Whom they do not see, hear, or feel. There is nothing palpable around them but the air they breathe and the sights and sounds of earth; yet they kneel, because they know by their souls, though they do not by their senses, that there is such a Being—the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible. The whole inside of a church, and all that goes on in it, is a wonderful proof of the intense belief at the bottom of all human hearts, however much they may neglect it, in a God Who is our absolute Lord and Maker, and Who will finally reward or punish us according as we serve Him. Yet day after day men go to church, and go through the service, and all this does not come home to them or strike them as it should. It seems to be part of the business of life, coming to church, and they go through it with the feeling that they are doing a duty, and that it would be very wrong to be away; but they do not realize the invisible world in it. This is the special thing it should do; and this seems to be just the very thing which it does not do. Nay, it seems often, rather positively to drive out such thoughts from the mind. It is, I believe, no unfamiliar experience that when men are by themselves they have often deep convictions as to the Invisible One: the idea of His presence may lay strong hold upon them in solitude and in their own chambers, where they have no external aid to devotion; and they may go to church, and as soon as ever they find themselves in church, and see everything prepared for and expecting their devotion, and calculated to rouse it, it all slides away; they are immediately in a common-

place frame of mind, and see and hear the service going on as a mere matter of course, and are, in short, in the world again.

Indeed we know there are some who boldly say, that they perform their devotions much better at home than at church, and who refuse to come to church on that plea. It is much to be doubted, indeed, whether such persons ever perform any real devotions at all. And there is a presumption in giving such a reason for declining to do an express command of God, which shows immediately great levity of mind. Yet it must be owned that these persons have something which looks like a reason for this distinction. They have come to church, perhaps, and have felt themselves disturbed, and found it difficult to keep up such ideas as they wanted to do, in consequence of the fact of its being a public scene, containing ordinary people and common things; and they have been impatient, and concluded at once that they had better pray, as they say, at home.

This is a subject, then, which it may be useful a little to dwell on. I mean the effect which coming to church has upon men, what impressions they imbibe from the place, and what they do there, and what state of mind they are in when they are in church.

It is not to be denied, then, that there are considerable difficulties and obstructions to devotion, as well as aids to it, in a church. In the first place there is a number of people collected together. This is in itself a sight of this earth. It is collected together indeed for a good, invisible, unworldly end; still what is collected is visible, is material, is of this world. An assemblage

of men and women is such a sight in itself. Even a religious assembly is a worldly object to a man, apart from considering for what it has met. He sees human faces and expressions; the men have their different characters marked upon their faces, the characters which common life and business have left upon them. All these are earthly associations. Moreover, he knows many of those whom he meets in church, who they are, what they have been; he has heard about them, or visited with them; perhaps they are persons whom he meets in the streets constantly. Everyday life thus enters into church; he looks about him, and sees the town, the village, whatever place he may be living in, staring him in the face. People are dressed as he sees them dressed elsewhere; they look the same as they did when he saw them last. They are worshippers, indeed, and if he thinks only of that they are mementoes of eternity; but they are ordinary men and women, and so far as he thinks of that only they are mementos of this world, and keep his mind in it.

All this is apt to produce a result, and that result is a dry and cold kind of worship. It seems to convert the worship of God into a sort of worldly process and operation. Water does not rise above its level; no more does an act of the mind rise above that state of mind in which it is done. If the church is a worldly scene to us, then our worship is a worldly performance. I do not say that we do not perform it as a duty, and as a religious duty; but that religious duty itself seems to be made an earthly one. It is brought under the head of things which we do as members of this world

and social beings: things which we do from conscientious motives, but to which an honest secular conscience is adequate, and which do not demand penetrating faith or a lively apprehension of a world besides this one. How many duties are there of this kind, duties by no means to be undervalued, and which every religious person will do, but which it is not necessary to be a religious person in order to do! Such are the duties of being attentive in our worldly callings, the duties of parents to support and educate their children, of servants to do what their masters tell them, of labourers to be industrious, of stewards to be faithful in affairs of property, and a multitude of the like. There is a secular, and there is a higher or a religious sphere of duty. The idea of religious worship I am speaking of tends to bring it under the former of these two heads, and to make it not the act of a mind specially alive to the fact of another world, keeping, as far as possible, this world out of sight, passing by the seen, and realizing the unseen, but the act of a mind staying within the worldly sphere of thought and duty, and including religion within it.

The very fact then, I say, of a church being a public place of worship is apt to make our worship often cold and commonplace. There are other hindrances in church. People find it difficult to make their attention keep pace with the reading of the prayers. They cannot choose their own time; they must go along with the rest of the congregation. This is a difficulty to most. Their attention is quicker at some times than at others. They find themselves interfered with by the order of

public service; they have gone through a part of the service themselves before the rest have gone through it. At such times their attention is apt to be impatient and wander, and they have to recall it. Meantime the service has been going on, and they have lost some of it. The task of recovering attention is a hard one. It requires an effort; and when effort has to be made, devotion seems dull and cold. Other hindrances could be mentioned: but I have said enough perhaps to remind us that, with all its aid and stimulants to devotion, public prayer has also some considerable circumstances which tend to deaden devotion, and make it commonplace.

Now let us consider what remedy there is to these unfavourable effects incident to public worship, and to this tendency to deadness and coldness in church.

We must remember then that a place is very much to us what we make it to be. Our own thoughts make a church solemn to us; our own thoughts make it dull and heavy. It depends upon the frame of mind a man is in, whether the same church and congregation, the walls and worshippers, are the most powerful memento of the invisible world to him, or are a mere collection of human faces and a memento of earth. What we have to do then is evidently to cultivate a frame of mind in ourselves, to control and mould our thoughts, to make ourselves look upon church in the view in which we should look upon it, to fasten upon and possess our minds with the awful, the holy, high and religious character of the place. And this should be done, not once or twice in a passing way, and upon

impulse, but regularly and systematically, day after day, and Sunday after Sunday, as often as we come to church at all. I mean that this state of mind should not be left to chance, but should be aimed at—be aimed at deliberately and laboriously—that we should endeavour as systematically to acquire this frame of mind as we would to acquire any language, or art, or profession. It is a process of time and steady attention acquiring a language. Our minds resist at first the introduction of such new matter into them; they will not remember or retain the new words and constructions; they throw them off as so much weight upon them. But at last the memory is taken captive; the language, by repeated lessons, and by the same things being learnt and said again and again, gains a footing and becomes domesticated in our minds, and almost as known and familiar perhaps as our own native tongue to us. In the same way an habitual frame of mind is acquired. That frame of mind which makes church a solemn and awful and impressive place to us is acquired by uniform attention and effort, time after time, made and sustained in church. The worldly fancy will struggle long and resist, and throw off the solemn thought; it will crowd the mind with commonplace images and recollections. The undisciplined worshipper has all kinds of loose earthly ideas carrying him off at every moment; but if the solemn sense of reality is but fairly striven for, it will gradually, by little and little, establish itself within him; the impression of church as a holy and awful place will grow stronger and stronger the oftener it is sustained, driving out idle and

profane thoughts, and becoming the natural and constant bias of his mind.

Let us consider only how very much the force of habit operates in the other direction, when it has once set in; how very much the cold and commonplace aspect of church grows upon us by being given way to. It is the nature of habit indeed to perpetuate itself. If time after time a person goes to church and thinks of earthly common things there, and only sees a collection of human faces there, that idea of church becomes a fixed and solid one. Every time he goes there, he only sees in a church the place in which he has had and carried on all his miscellaneous, commonplace, earthly thoughts. He has this image of it fastened upon him; that is his idea of a church as a place to be in. One line of thought has desecrated and made it common; it is no longer a place to feel solemnly and reverentially in; it is that place which his thoughts have made it to him—a place to be easy and comfortable, dreamy and idle-minded in. Just as some places are pleasing and others painful from their associations, so church is dull, dry, and commonplace, from its associations. Every time he enters it embodies to him, and reflects in its impression upon him, the character of the thoughts that he has pursued within its walls; he feels that he can do what he likes in it; it has no restraining, solemnizing effect upon him, because his own inward behaviour in it has already vulgarized it. He has made free with it so long that it has ceased to be holy. But as habit operates for evil, habit in the same way operates for good. If time after time we are devout and attentive

in church, then church will become to us that place which we have been devout and attentive in. A line of reverential feeling will be formed in connexion with it. It will remind us of holy thoughts. We shall be afraid to think profanely and idly in a place in which we have thought of God, and prayed heartily to Him. It will be a desecration of it to behave so lightly in it. The holiness of the place will have established itself in our minds, and it will be to us what its associations have made it. We shall be calmed and sobered as in an unearthly atmosphere; we shall be impressed; there will be the stamp of religion on the walls, and we shall enjoy an isolation from worldly thoughts on the ground on which we have been accustomed to separate ourselves in thought from earth.

Such a state of mind as this is what every period of proper attention in church tends to produce. Do we then complain to ourselves that church is a dull and commonplace scene to us, that we cannot really feel ourselves in the house of God when we are in it? do we see in it only a common assemblage? and does the weight of material things press upon us when we are there? and are we listless and dead in our feeling, and wandering in our thought? we have the remedy in ourselves. We have that within us which can make this place an awful one to us whenever we enter it; a solemn and unearthly one, subduing the worldly, quickening the spiritual fancy. We can make it a church. "How dreadful is this place!" said Jacob; "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet,"

was Moses told, "for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." All these awful feelings we have it in our own power gradually to acquire by constant, devout attention to prayer in church. We long indeed to be in some place which will affect us of itself, and make us devotional by force; we want a devotional atmosphere, and to be able simply to look around us, and be struck, and solemnized, and spiritualized by every sight and sound; a common congregation is all this to the heavenly mind of the mature and disciplined worshipper. He hears the prayers, and sees a kneeling congregation, and knows that it is the great Invisible One to Whom these signs of adoration are made. That is enough. He can say with truth, "How dreadful is this place!" An ordinary congregation becomes all this to a really constant, faithful worshipper, who, every time he is in church, sustains and keeps alive the feeling that he is in the house of God. That feeling grows. He sees the house of God where others only see a fabric of brick or stone. And where others are listless, dull, and unoccupied, he is impressed and feels the awfulness of the place. "They shall go from strength to strength, and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Zion." "How amiable are Thy dwellings, Thou Lord of hosts! My soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God."

*SERMON IV.*

# Thought for the Morrow.

"*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*"—MATTHEW vi. 34.

IT is evident upon common grounds of reason, and from numberless other passages of Scripture, that this text does not mean that men should absolutely not think at all of the future, and leave things completely to take care of themselves. At the same time there is a danger often, when a text of Scripture does not mean all that the naked words grammatically signify, of supposing practically that it has no meaning at all, and letting it go for nothing; whereas it may have a very strong, a very intelligible meaning if we fairly consider it, and a meaning which will be found to exert, if we allow it, great influence upon our whole line of thought and action. Indeed, there are certain texts of Scripture which we can hardly see without their raising the idea that they were meant particularly to arrest and strike the eye of a reader as it went over the sacred pages. And while all Scripture is given for our instruction and edification, some parts of it undoubtedly fasten upon our attention more than others, not from any

fancy of our own, but because there is something really peculiar and distinctive about them. Either they are more pithy and concise, or they are more severe, or they are more compassionate, or they are specially opposed to some common human mode of thinking. This perhaps is one of them. In coming across this text then, though we at once see that it must not be taken wholly to forbid all looking forward to and providing for the future, yet, on the other hand, it is quite apparent that it does contain some great and important qualification with respect to this looking forward and providing; that it imposes some check upon it, and directs us to some habit of mind which is to counterbalance and adjust it, some habit of mind which is of a contrary kind to that of looking forward and planning, and which, though it may be consistent with it, still will and must greatly affect and modify it.

Now there is one great doctrine in the Bible, and it is brought out especially in the New Testament, more particularly in that chapter of the gospel of St. Matthew from which the text is taken, which must be seen at the very first mention of it to have a very strong bearing upon the temper in which we look forward and provide for the future; and that is the doctrine of a particular Providence. Every reader of Scripture knows that the doctrine of a particular Providence is expressed very strongly and constantly in it; by a particular Providence meaning a providence which consults for and attends to every individual person in the world. The doctrine of a providence of some kind is a doctrine of natural religion; for if we admit there is a God at all,

we must admit that He provides for the world which He has made; for its maintenance and its order. But we might believe this, and yet only have the idea that God provided for the maintenance of the world generally, for the preservation of the order of nature as a whole. Indeed it is a very natural mistake, and one which, with all our light on this subject, has a very deep and habitual hold over us, that God only interferes in large things, and does not in small. To correct such ideas, then, the Bible teaches a particular Providence, and insists strongly upon it. It tells us that every person in the world is thought of individually, and consulted for and provided for individually, by an Almighty and All-seeing God. And it tells us to look upon ourselves as under this governance and this watching; not to look upon ourselves as left to ourselves, but as having the eye and the care of Another, much higher than ourselves, always over us. It tells us to be assured that, if we will have faith in this Power, the life of every one of us, and all the events in it, will be controlled and directed to a good result; and that every accident will be overruled for good; and that what we think at the time to be most unfortunate will be turned by this Providence of God to the very opposite. Thus St. Paul says that "all things work together for good to them that love God;" and, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" And in the Psalms, "Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is; Who helpeth them to right that suffer wrong, Who feedeth the hungry; Who looseth men out of prison, giveth sight to the blind, helpeth them that are fallen, careth for the righteous,

careth for the strangers, defendeth the fatherless and widow;" that is to say, Who is not only the Maker and Ruler of the world in general, but also of the individuals in it, whom He individually cares for and supports.

This doctrine of a particular Providence is indeed sometimes made use of by men in a way which is not exactly profitable to them; for some persons have a way of talking about themselves and their own history, and the means through which, and the ends to which, they have been conducted, which might lead one hastily to remark that they made too much of a particular Providence. But the truth is, if we examine it, the fault of such persons does not consist in making too much, but in making too little of it. Not in thinking that Providence cares too much about them; for they cannot possibly overrate the care of Providence for them; but in forgetting that the same Providence cares quite as much about all other persons. They think defectively and unworthily about a particular Providence; they narrow its sphere. Such persons have, if we got to the bottom of their minds, a kind of idea that there are a certain number regarding whom, on account of their importance and prominence in the several fields of exertion in which they are employed, a particular Providence exists and operates; but that the rest of the world are under a general providence, and come in the shape of masses and classes under the eye of God, but not as persons and individuals. It is obvious what a lowering this is of the idea of a particular Providence, which gets its great dignity and its great beauty from

its universality. Because it is only when we understand and realize that it is literally everybody, that is to say, the poorest, and meanest, and most ignorant of the human race, as well as the highest and most influential, who are under it, that we can fully understand that this particular Providence is entirely and simply the result of love and condescension on God's part, and is not in any way the consequence of any importance and greatness on man's part. If we apply it only to individuals here and there, who are more or less prominent and important, it appears rather to be something due to their importance, than the simple effect of gratuitous love in God Himself; but realized as universal, a particular Providence cannot be abused to any purposes of pride; it is indeed a most humbling and softening doctrine.

Now when there is this particular Providence which consults for and watches over every one of us, it is obvious that we must, if we realize such a truth, feel differently with respect to our own providing for, and looking out for ourselves than if we did not believe in such a Providence. It may be our duty to exercise our own foresight and vigilance still; for God, I need not say, acts through our natural capacities, and not independently of them. Still there is a difference, and a great difference, between having some one beside ourselves who takes care of us and having nobody but ourselves. If we feel that we have some one besides ourselves who does this, we think altogether differently with respect to ourselves and our prospects than if we stood alone; there is a different temper and spirit at

once given to our care and exertions for ourselves. In a certain sense it is just like any other case in which we have some one or other person caring and providing for us—some parent, or relation, or friend. What is the use of such a person, if we are still to have exactly the same anxiety, and trouble, and apprehension about our own interests, as if we were left to our own guidance solely? There are advantages indeed, I admit, over and above that of the saving ourselves care and trouble; still everybody knows that the saving of this care and anxiety is one of the greatest advantages which is got from having the benevolent superintendence of another person over us; and if we are to be deprived of that immunity and privilege of comparative freedom from care, it would be losing one of the greatest benefits of such a situation. And the same may be said of our situation as living under God's particular Providence. We should be depriving ourselves of one of the greatest privileges we derive from it, if we were to have exactly the same anxiety, and care, and apprehension about ourselves, when we were under it, that we should have if we thought no such Providence existed. There is no necessity and no call for that keen anxiety, and in our look-out into the future that nervousness and agitation, that we should otherwise have. There is no reason why we should be always thinking about the subject. There is another Who careth for us. It is obvious that Scripture intends us to make our belief in God's foresight for us a consideration for tempering and moderating our own forethought for ourselves; that it

intends the fact to relieve us, and take a burden off our minds. It is evident that Scripture does contemplate a state of mind in Christians on the subject, which is quite different from what any man could arrive at by his own reason: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" These words, I say, denote a peculiar state of mind which Christianity requires; there is something remarkable in them, which is not to be explained away.

I will mention now some general advantages resulting from the state of mind which has been described; from the comparative freedom and absence of anxiety Scripture inculcates upon us with respect to the future.

The first advantage then, which has been already alluded to, is sufficiently obvious; for it is this very freedom of spirit, and the absence of anxiety itself, that is the advantage. Let us consider. The capacity for forethought is indeed a gift of which it is impossible sufficiently to estimate the value and the dignity; and it is unnecessary to say that men differ from the brute creation principally in having it. It is, in short, only another term for reason.

As reasonable creatures we are able to look before us; and not to look before us in simple curiosity, but really to form judgments with respect to the future, and to determine what is likely to take place. We are able to profit by experience and observation, and from what

has happened to conjecture what will happen under like circumstances. Without waiting till the actual events come, we are able to make use of various signs and symptoms of their approach—to see hints and intimations, and draw inferences from all kinds of casual appearances as to what is coming. And according as we judge beforehand, we form our plans, and take our steps. This is human forethought, and it is undoubtedly a most noble and valuable gift.

But it is evident at the same time, upon a very little consideration, that this capacity of forethought is the source of much needless misery to man, much agitation and inquietude of mind, which he would not have had without it. For when we once have the gift we do not know how to control it, there is something so perfectly indefinite about it; and we do not know when to stop thinking, and estimating, and calculating. The materials for forethought are so infinite and so perpetually near at hand, that we can never escape out of their reach, and be anywhere where things do not take place around us upon which we cannot conjecture and forecast. Indeed I will be bold to say, that with all the advantage this gift is to us, there is not a single natural gift which leads to greater waste of mind, and more unsettling of temper; and has more unprofitable, and useless, and positively injurious results in the way of thought, than this. For take any one who has some expectation—upon some ground of probability, however small—that a certain event in which he would be much interested, for bad or for good, may at some time take place. If he is a person of forethought, and naturally

anxious, how for long periods beforehand will he be watching narrowly everything that happens in the smallest connection with the subject, and forming inferences thence! how will he notice the faintest apparent signs and intimations, and turn the smallest thing that occurs into an omen, one way or another. In this way a vast quantity of time is wasted, and the mind is enfeebled by being kept in a state of morbid internal excitement. Indeed the very acuteness of this faculty misleads us, and we see people so sharp in seeing the bearings of things, and all their tendencies, so quick in detecting signs and symptoms everywhere, that their minds are incommoded by their very penetration, and perplexed by their very clearness. It is obvious what an effect such a faculty of our minds as this will have, when—as in the majority of instances does happen in this world—the event to be looked forward to is something evil. Evil is multiplied a thousandfold by such a process, and its shadows and signs, true or false, haunt and occupy the mind incessantly long before it comes itself, if it comes at all; and multitudes of small occurrences, which would have no meaning but for that, become disagreeably significant, and become evils of themselves, keeping a person in constant anxiety and apprehension, because they are taken in connection with some expected evil event in the distance. A word, a look, a motion, a turn of a sentence, a tone and accent, are enough to disturb; every small thing is made ominous and suggestive; and evil, by this faculty of forethought, is made something which pursues, and wears, mocks, and

tortures the mind, and thus is rendered needlessly powerful at a distance, instead of being simply borne when it takes place.

The conclusion we come to is, that this faculty of forethought in us, wise gift as it is, is still like others, a wild, loose, and undisciplined faculty in itself, and that it requires to be checked and moulded. As a source of much needless distress, we want protection from it. Our Saviour gives this protection in the passage of Scripture before us. His words were not addressed to thoughtless, careless people who never looked before them, nor to encourage such persons in a habit of carelessness; but they were addressed to thoughtful and grave persons who did look forward; and assuming such a habit of forethought to be a good and proper habit, they apply a correction to the insatiableness of it, and a relief from the oppressiveness of it: "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The words are compassionate ones, suited to the mouth of Him Who said, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls: for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Our Lord says that there is evil enough to bear according to God's appointment, without making it greater by our own. There are evils actual and present. He seems to say, "Submit to them, as they are sent to you. But as for what is shadowy and distant and impending, do not convert that into a present actual evil. If you realize that you are under

a Providence, that in itself will keep distant evil at its proper distance."

Another advantage connected with the state of mind which the text recommends is the positive gaining of time; for by not having our minds occupied always with cares, we have the more time at liberty for religious uses. There is no more common excuse for not attending to and thinking of religion than that of want of time. Men say they really have so much to do and so much to think of in their worldly callings, that they cannot find vacant intervals for religious thought or devotional exercises. Now it is very true that some persons have more to do in the world than others, and yet it is a most important consideration, and one which they would do well to examine their own minds very accurately about, what kind of secular thought and occupation this is which so engages them; I mean, whether it is good and fair and sound secular thought and occupation, or whether it is vague, loose, and unsound; for there are two very distinct ways in which a man's worldly business occupies his mind and attention. There is what I may call legitimate attention; that is to say, that attention which is given to the *bona fide* carrying on of a business or calling, that which decides and plans and arranges and executes; and there is what I may call illegitimate attention, when a man goes on brooding loosely over his business and calling, thinking fondly and uselessly over what has been done, or dreaming idly over what is to be done, and exercising an anxious, fretful imagination rather than his proper energy upon it. It would be found, I believe, that in

the majority of cases in which the plea of occupation was set up for want of due attention to religion, that it was not the former kind of occupation which really stood in men's way, but the latter. It is not legitimate attention to business which in the majority of cases interferes with a man's time for religion, not that attention by which he really executes what he has to do; no, it is that attention which is useless and which is idle, that species of mental occupation which is of least service for his worldly business, which generally most interferes with his religious. And for this simple reason, that legitimate attention to business is a limited thing; it has its regular periods, it confines itself to service and to action, and therefore it is commensurate with its task, and therefore it is limited, because its task is limited; and when work is done it is at liberty, and open to the reception of other subjects. But to illegitimate attention there is in the nature of the case no limit whatever. It is absolutely indefinite; for limit to mere useless, idle, anxious brooding, what can there be? There is no cause why it ever should stop.

Here then the advantage of the free and unanxious state of mind recommended in the text comes in. It just cuts off that unsound and idle part of devotion to secular business which most of all interferes with a man's time for religion. Our Saviour's word condemns anxiousness, not industry. It is anxiousness, not industry, that really distracts the mind, and prevents higher thought; but anxiousness is that which fills up most time, and the removal of which therefore does most for leaving time free and open for

religious uses. St. Paul's saying comes very much to this point, and is in perfect agreement with our Saviour's in the text. "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," says the Apostle; that is, he recommends a state of mind in which a man first does the work of his worldly calling briskly, and then is able to leave it and turn to religion with warmth. The recommendation, while in favour of definite exertion, is against indefinite and perpetual thought and brooding over worldly business. Our Saviour's precept is to the same effect, and the advantage it offers is the same; viz., that it enables a man to give his mind to religion, and to be fervent in spirit.

One word in conclusion. Here is a state of mind described to which various privileges attach—a state of mind in which there is the greatest freedom from care and anxiety for ourselves, on the ground of there being One who careth and provideth for us. Let us remember that we cannot fairly throw ourselves upon God's fatherly care unless we also do our best to do His will. To be able to feel this freedom, and exonerate ourselves thus, we should be of the number of those to whom He has pledged Himself, that all things shall work together for their good; and that class is the class of those that "love God." To throw ourselves upon Him is an act of love, and it is a hypocritical act unless it is connected with the sincere resolution to obey Him. If on the whole we are obedient, anxious to know His will and ready to act upon it, we may then consistently take the benefit of being His children by casting all our care upon Him. But it is quite inconsistent to take the

benefit of being His children, and not to show the obedience of children. Nor indeed can we do so. Our own hearts would prevent us. It is only the witness of our hearts that we strive to unite our will to His, and wish to serve Him, that can make us really expect good from God, and rely upon Him as a Friend and Protector.

*SERMON V.*

# The Relief of Utterance.

"*O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before Thee: O let my prayer enter into Thy presence, incline thine ear unto my calling.*"—PSALM lxxxviii. 1.

IN taking for my text the opening verse of the eighty-eighth Psalm, it is necessary for me to say, in the first place, that this psalm is written under feelings of affliction, and deep heaviness of spirit. But this is not the peculiarity of the psalm, because many others are also written under feelings of the same kind. The peculiarity of this psalm is not that it is written under these feelings, but that these feelings are never once interrupted or relieved throughout it. Other psalms are expressions of grief; but they rise to joy eventually. This psalm never rises to joy. Nor in noticing this peculiarity do I profess to be observing what others have not observed for themselves. This is a remark always made on this psalm, and indeed it is a very obvious one.

What is the reason then of this peculiarity? and why is it that this psalm does not rise to joy? For it is natural to think that if one psalm differs so from the rest, there is a reason for it; for the psalms are written for our use, and therefore any striking cha-

racteristic of any of them must be considered to have been permitted and ordered by the Holy Spirit for an object, and that this particular psalm might do something, fill a want, answer a purpose, which other psalms, equally serviceable in their way, do not. Is the reason in this case that the grief expressed was too holy, as it were, too sacred to be interfered with by the levity, as it might be considered, of joy? Certainly a person might be excused if some such idea as this occurred to him to account for it; for it cannot be denied that there is something deeply sacred, and very repulsive of any ordinary satisfactions or solaces from without, in the tone of this psalm; and that even to read it is something like walking in the valley of the shadow of death. Is this the reason then? and is joy, as it were, too vulgar and light a thing to be admitted into the cavern of this sacred grief? And just as when walking in a deep wood impenetrable to the light of day we do not want the light, for fear it should disturb the sanctity of the gloom, is it that joy would be a descent from the dignity and solemnity of this psalm? I do not think this is the reason; for, in fact, joy is just as holy as grief, if there is proper reason for feeling it. Indeed it takes precedence of it, so far as regards the mere rank of the two feelings, being eternal in the case of the good, whereas grief is only temporary.

What is the reason of it I shall now endeavour to explain.

When we look attentively into this psalm, then, we do not find that it does in reality exclude consolation,

but only that it expresses one particular stage of consolation; viz., the first and earliest one of all. Everybody knows enough of human nature to know that there is a first and preliminary stage of relief after sorrow, in which the mind in fact relieves itself by the expression of that sorrow. Mute grief, which is sealed up, and finds no vent, is an unrelieved burden. Simple expression is alleviation. And of this very preliminary consolation, which consists in expression, the first stage is that in which the mind expresses this sorrow to itself by a flow of thought and inward rumination upon it, without communicating with others. Such inward expression is a very sensible relief. There is indeed a mode of contemplating and dwelling upon occasions of sorrow which is anything but consolatory, where owing to a certain weakness, moral or physical, a man cannot withdraw his mind from a painful subject, but is fascinated by it in the same way people are who have undergone some great fright, and cannot rid themselves of the sense of it, but carry it about with them as a burden fastened upon them. But there is also a mode of contemplating grief which is consolatory, when the heart, having got over the first blow, is able to commune with itself; and gains relief by such communing. Such contemplative states of mind indeed give relief simply as being a rest; for all mental suffering, like bodily, is fatigue, and requires, like other fatigue, rest after it. But such sorrowing is also an unconscious act of hope; there is anticipation in it, a looking forward to something remedial.

This is the first admission then into that large remedial system which the Author of nature has provided for human sorrow, when the sufferer expresses his grief to himself. The next is when he expresses it to others, and when that most admirable and beautiful machinery for alleviating evil and pain in our nature, begins to open out and show its resources. But I am speaking now only of the first or simple act of inward expression or communing.

Suppose then this inward act to be going on; not between the man and himself simply, but as an address to God, to be made consciously as under His eye, and under a definite sense of His power. And it must be seen that such an act is in a still higher degree a consolatory one; for it goes on in the presence of, and as an appeal to, One Who we know has all power in heaven and earth; Who can afflict and Who can assuage, as it pleases Him; Who has permitted this present grief, and can remove it. To sorrow in such a Presence is, still more than before, an unconscious act of hope. It is to remind ourselves of His pity by regarding ourselves as objects for it; and so it is a fastening upon and taking hold unconsciously of the very Seat of all remedies, a recurrence to the very Source of all comfort.

Here then we arrive at the character and design of the eighty-eighth psalm. It is designed to express one particular stage of consolation; viz., the earliest one of all, that which consists in the simple expression of the sorrow itself, only with this addition, that it expresses it as in the presence of God, and as an address to Him. To sup-

pose then that this psalm did not introduce the element of consolation at all, and was mere sadness without relief, would be incorrect. All its expression indeed is that of grief; but that very expression is only one stage of consolation. The grief is relieved by giving due and reverential vent to it. A surface of evil is accompanied by a reserve and undercurrent of hope, and a grief externally unchecked proceeds upon an understanding that it is seen and compassionated by One Who is able to remove it.

Such being the character of this psalm, I shall now observe that such a psalm is wanted, and has special place and office in the inspired collection as being what it is—as being, that is to say, the representation of one particular stage and form of consolation in affliction. The Bible is a universal book, designed to embrace all the modes in which the divine power and mercy operate in this dispensation of things, and, amongst the rest, the different modes and stages of consolation which God has instituted for the relief of human sorrow. It takes cognizance of and provides for all states of mind and feeling which God has sanctioned, and which are truly natural ones. It is designed to help us to the expression of these states of feeling by supplying us with forms of language corresponding to them. The book of Psalms therefore takes cognizance among the rest of that stage of consolation in which grief is relieved by the simple expression of it, and the eighty-eighth psalm represents and supplies an inspired form for this state of mind.

In the next place, this stage of consolation has its own peculiar and characteristic graces, which entitle it

to such recognition. It is indeed the earliest, and therefore the least advanced stage; for whether this expression of grief is carried on within ourselves, or to others, or even as an appeal to God, still it is an act of expression simply. It is an act of the mind ridding itself of something which it feels lying heavy upon it—an unconscious act of throwing off a burden, or relieving a posture. It is an act of instinct, of nature, though that instinct and nature are religious. It does not pretend to the command and the loftiness of other and more advanced stages of consolation in which the mind has reflected and has surveyed; has arrived at a calm confidence that all the dispensations of God are for the best, and at a fixed content and satisfaction in consequence. It does not pretend to this. But if the more advanced stages of consolation have these high characteristics, the earlier ones are not without their peculiar interest either. They are nearer the beginning of things, closer to the fountain-head. In them the simple voice of Divine Love speaks, before man has yet added anything of his own strength and effort to it. Certainly the calm conclusion of reason, which, upon the survey of human things and the contemplation of the divine arrangements, justifies God and is satisfied, is admirable. And more than admirable, most majestic and full of glory, is that victory of resignation when the soul has arrived not only at a satisfaction in God's visitations, but at exultation and triumph in them. But the greatest victories of reason or of faith do not point so directly or so immediately to the one Source of all consolation, as that first stage and beginning of it which consists of

the soul's simple expression of its grief, and no more. Then God acts, and man simply follows. He feels the impulse to expression, and obeys it. The communing with himself, the musing, the thinking, the recourse to his fellow, the appeal to God, are less his own than God's acts within him, and show therefore God's love more simply. The inspired writers do occasionally show a remarkable leaning toward these beginnings, these primordial impulses in God's creatures, which send them, unconsciously to themselves, to Him for help before they have had opportunity for reasoning; nay, as taking place over those creatures which cannot reason, but act by instinct solely. What is the 104th psalm but one adoration of God as seen in the working of all nature, and in the instincts of His creatures, even His irrational creatures—instincts which are thus ranked as a sort of inspiration: "The lions roaring after their prey do seek their meat from God"? What do the brute creatures know about God, or about themselves? Nothing. We do not know that they know of their own existence. Yet the holy psalmist on that very account sees in their inarticulate appeals the sacred voice of Him Who made the world, and endows them with a sort of religious character, as if they were unconscious prayers. And so St. Paul says that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now;" not confining himself to God's rational creatures, but speaking of the whole living universe as penetrated by the feeling he is describing. It is thus that the inspired writers go back in the depth and intensity of their feelings to those first instincts which precede all effort of reason or will,

and seem to rejoice in reaching a place where at length, in depth and remoteness inaccessible, God alone is heard—to those first expressions of nature which are the original divine impulses within us in the direction of consolation and relief.

In conclusion, I shall observe that this psalm, expressing as it does the first act by which nature meets the oppression of grief, the very commencement and opening of the divine remedial system, reminds us of a great truth respecting this dispensation of things. For what does a remedial system which we see so clearly in nature imply but sorrow, pain, and disappointment rooted in nature, and belonging to the very system and order of things in which we live? The state of the case then with respect to this world is, that it does not contain much positive and pure happiness, and that the satisfactions it does supply are rather of a secondary sort—remedial to dissatisfaction. And it is a great advantage to be really acquainted with this leading characteristic of our mortal state. Hence it is that occasions of grief become often, when the first blow is over, sources of content and repose—and that men, so far from being ultimately more miserable for them, are on the contrary happier; viz., because these occasions introduce them to, and acquaint them with, that remedial system under which we live here; whereas before they had not yet been introduced to it, or knew of it. Before they had experience of pain they went on blindly, supposing that this world was to supply them with positive happiness, and aiming eagerly, perhaps violently, at it. Of course in this aim they were repulsed, because the

object was not to be had; and the consequence was discontent and disquiet; for though there might be no positive misfortune to complain of, still it was vexatious that they should be always trying to reach a certain point of happiness and never succeed. And this kind of vexation is very far from being a nominal or light one; on the contrary, it is real disturbance and annoyance, causing sensations of emptiness and unappeased appetite, and producing angry, rebellious feeling. But the experience of distress, when it comes, has shown them their mistake, and let them into the secret respecting this present system; viz., that its happiness is a remedial, not a primary one. They see the nature of that satisfaction which it is designed to bestow, that it is moderate and humble, meant to relieve, not to fill the soul. They endeavour therefore wisely to accommodate themselves to this system; they accept with thankfulness what it gives them, and, being thankful, they obtain a measure of real enjoyment from it. The habit of thought and feeling which occasions of grief have established in their minds now becomes a more real satisfaction to them than all their former freedom from grief; they are happier as men relieved than before they had anything to require relief. Their hearts are softened, their desires chastened; they are in that state of mind to relish whatever measure of happiness it may please God to send them; whereas before, though they had a much greater outward happiness, they were not in a state of mind to enjoy it. They no longer keep up the vain fight with God's dispensations, or receive those hard rebuffs which such resistance leads to; they

no longer search for what is not to be found, and weary themselves to no purpose.

Such is the result to which occasions of distress lead in the case of well-disposed minds. But it is well to mention also another result to which they sometimes lead. It is not uncommon to see persons, after a period of distress, rush even into greater levity and greediness for pleasure than before. The reaction carries them away. A reaction after pain is indeed what everybody should be on his guard against. After a fit of low spirits, *e.g.*, there is a great tendency to an insolent state of mind. The excitement of relief is overpowering, and, the dark hour over, a man loses control over himself in the pleasure of the transition, and gives a proud and lawless fancy and spirits free range. Nor, perhaps, is there anything which shows more the need we have of chastisement than the extraordinary insolence into which men rush when chastisement is over. This is a miserable effect of a divine visitation. For so, instead of gaining one settled habit, viz., the resigned and patient one, we go on alternating between two moods, one high, the other low, but neither of them religious. It is sad when a result follows from a divine visitation which that visitation was specially designed to prevent, and when the very effect of chastisement is an outbreak of pride.

Let us then use this psalm for the purposes for which it was given. Let us use it to express our feeling before God when we are under affliction. Let us use it for the hint it gives us as to the nature of this temporal dispensation, that it is one not of primary

satisfaction, so much as of reliefs and remedies. Let us not grasp at what cannot be had, and so miss what is in our power. Let us be content with moderate, with secondary satisfactions. A remedial system, if it is solid and effective, is not to be underrated, as if it were not worth enjoying. If it is honest, if it does what it pretends to do, it is distributive of a very tolerable measure of happiness; such as is enough to sustain our strength and keep our minds in vigour. The want of this is felt, and therefore the remedies and consolations are relished when they come. Let us only remember when we receive them that they come from God; that it is He Who gives us this power of resistance and this spring of life, and all those remedial resources within and without us which we have; that it is He Who bears us up, and can give His servants even the wings of eagles when it pleases Him. On the other hand, when distress comes, of body or mind, let us remember how great the insolence of nature is, and what strong rebukes and chastisements it needs to keep it within tolerable bounds. Let us be on our guard against any revival of this insolence after its temporary depression. Let us bear affliction with a single view to greater self-control, more resignation, more humility; ever strongly impressed with the great utility and serviceableness of it, the impossibility of growing in grace without it. A practical sense of this necessity will suppress our murmurs, and will fortify our wills. We shall thus bear grief with patience, and receive consolations with thankfulness, knowing that it is the same God Who administers discipline and mercy.

*SERMON VI.*

# Seeking a Sign.

"*And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*"—LUKE xvi. 30, 31.

THOSE who read their Bible attentively will see that our Lord says two things about signs and miracles. First, He says that miracles are necessary as evidence that a revelation comes from God. How indeed could we possibly tell that God spoke to us unless He gave us some mark to distinguish a communication from Him from a communication from a fellow-creature? How could we tell that the Bible was specially inspired by Him, and was His revelation to us, unless it had been attended by miracles of some kind? In this respect then, and for this one very reasonable purpose, our Lord approves of the desire for miracles as a proper and religious want. He Himself worked miracles for this end. It is true that the miracles He wrought served another purpose also. They were works of mercy, by which He healed the diseases and relieved the afflictions of men, and not works of wonder only; and they served to manifest the character of the Son of God as the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. They revealed

the depths of His compassion for human miseries and infirmities, and made men see what was really the mind of Christ, and recognize the image of God in Him—that God Who, as St. John tells us, is Love. But besides this our Lord's miracles also were wrought for the purpose of showing that what He said came from God, and was not a merely human communication. "If I had not done among them," He says, "the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father."* That is to say, "They could not have told that this was a divine revelation unless I distinguished it by particular tokens which it was above human power to afford." So far then our Lord approves of and sanctions the desire for the miraculous; but, on the other hand, He treats this desire in a very different way as soon as ever it exceeds this particular reasonable purpose. When He sees that persons only want miracles for the sake of excitement, to occupy their minds with something strange and different from their common ordinary duties to God and man, He then speaks in a different tone. He does not encourage this sort of wonder-seeking, but on the contrary rebukes it. Thus when the scribes and Pharisees came to Him and said, "Master, we would see a sign from Thee," He answered and said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights

* John xv. 24.

in the heart of the earth."* And the parable, part of which I have taken for my text, is to the same purpose. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

The first lesson this passage teaches us is, that we must take things in the order in which God sends them. God gives us our consciences first, the law written in our hearts, which tells us what to do and what to avoid. This law gives a great deal to do to God and our neighbour—our neighbour being all the people around us, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, our relations and friends, our equals, superiors, inferiors. If we obey this law, He then vouchsafes sometimes to comfort and cheer His servants by special providences. But if persons expect special providences first, and then say that they will begin to think of doing their ordinary duties, they then invert this order which God has established. I use the word special providences because these answer in some measure to the miracles and signs which the Jews in our Lord's time sought after. People nowadays do not expect actual miracles to be worked for them, but they are not on that account safe from the spirit which prompted the Jews to ask for signs. That special want or craving which went in the direction of signs and miracles then, goes in the direction of special providences now. That is to say people now, as the Jews did of old, like to wait for some extraordinary and striking event to change their hearts and give them a turn to the service of God, before they take this important step. They are content

* Matt. xii. 39, 40.

with remaining as they are in the interim; they put off the entrance upon a religious life till something, as it were, forces them to begin it. This is the very disposition, then, which our Lord rebukes in the parable. He tells such people that they are waiting for what they do not need, and for what is quite superfluous; that they know perfectly well what their duty is, and that knowing it they do not want any other call than this plain knowledge. They have Moses and the Prophets, they have, as Christians, the New Testament as well; the Bible tells them what life they ought to lead plainly enough. What are they waiting for? Are not here reasons enough and motive enough to them to induce them to set about this work? This is what the Bible everywhere presses upon us; viz., the effect which the simple knowledge of our duty, without any other aid or circumstance whatever, ought to have upon us. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans describes it as the great sin of the whole human race that, having the knowledge, they have not treated or regarded this knowledge itself as a reason for acting, a motive to make them do what they know; and he says this is the cause of God's anger. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. . . . So that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful."* And thus he

* Rom. i. 18–21.

confronts the Jew with a charge simply founded on his knowledge. Thou "knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law. . . . . Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?"* The Apostle shows, particularly in the beginning of this Epistle, how it had always been the last thing that people thought of—doing what was right because they knew it; that they had regularly and systematically put this effect of knowledge aside, as if it was an irrevelant thing. And now we see that it is just the same with many people, that they go on never thinking that simple knowledge of religious duties constitutes any claim whatever upon them. If at some extraordinary moment it does occur to them that, knowing what their duty is, they ought to do it, it occurs to them as quite an odd and a strange idea; it almost startles them, and they immediately put it aside as a sort of capricious suggestion, and fall back into the old comfortable habit of knowing and not doing, as if it was an order of nature; of saying "I know; I know the law of God, but still I must wait for something; something must happen before I can apply myself to perform it; there must be disturbance and alteration of affairs. I cannot do it while things are going on the same as they always have done, and taking their regular course. It will come upon me all at once at the proper time."

And when we say that if persons have knowledge, this is quite enough of itself to make them responsible, it is not amiss to add that almost every one has this

* Rom. ii. 18–23.

knowledge. There is a great deal said now about the ignorance of some classes, but I very much doubt about this ignorance. It is not that people—the most humble in rank and station—do not know perfectly well what they ought to do. They may not know some things, but what constitutes practically their duty to God and man, that they do know, and know very well, just as well as the highest and richest. Everybody in this parish, *e.g.*, knows perfectly well that he ought to come to church regularly on Sundays; it is no want of knowledge which prevents him coming. What a great deal of knowledge indeed has the very poorest among us, just on those subjects which are the most vital and important. There are multitudes of things which it is of comparatively little consequence whether we know them or not, of which they are ignorant; but the truths of real consequence, truths relating to our duty to God and man, those they know quite well.

What I say then is, first, that to ask for signs, to wait for special providences, before we in the least attend to God's general law revealed in our hearts and in Scripture, is to subvert the natural order of things. But in the next place I observe, that it is just those people who, setting aside the regular call of conscience, wait for special providences to compel them to come to God, who totally neglect the warnings of special providences when they do come. Let us place before our minds a person of this temper, who says that he cannot enter into God's service, and take the first step, while things are going on in their accustomed way around him; and that he waits for some event to happen. Well,

an event does happen, the death perhaps of some acquaintance who has been his associate in sin; it comes as a piece of startling news to him. This then was what he was waiting for, and now is the time that he should really turn to God and begin to live in earnest to Him. But what is, as a matter of fact, the light in which he regards such an event? He may be a little shocked by it at first, but he immediately recovers himself, and says to himself, "Oh, this is nothing so particular! All people must die some time or other; it is a law of nature; we cannot escape it." He thus explains away all the striking and startling aspect of such an event, and reduces it to a mere ordinary fact of nature, which he need not at all be so impressed by. Having waited all along for a special providence, he then does not believe that the event is a special providence, or that it contains any warning to him when it comes. It was thus that those Jews who asked for a sign from our Lord treated the great and awful sign which evidenced His Godhead when it was given them. The sign that was given them was, as he foretold it would be, the sign of the prophet Jonas, that as Jonas was delivered out of the belly of the whale, where he had been three days and three nights, so the Son of man should rise from the tomb after the same sojourn there. Did they believe in that wonderful resurrection then, when it took place? We know that they did not and would not, but immediately set about explaining the disappearance of our Lord's body from the tomb upon natural principles—that it had been removed thence by His disciples during the night. "The chief priests and

Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead." In this way they showed themselves, as it were, afraid of the miracle, anxious that it should not take place, or rather, that it should be disbelieved when it did. They immediately set about prejudging the truth of it, and planning as if to prevent Almighty God from making this great exhibition of His power. And when our Lord had risen from the dead, this was the way in which they accounted for it; for St. Matthew tells that this saying, viz., that the disciples came by night and stole Him away, "was commonly reported among the Jews until this day."

It was thus that those who would not believe Moses and the prophets, when they foretold our Lord's coming, would not believe, though one rose from the dead. And we see much the same way of treating special providences now among those who ask for such signs, and idly and unreasonably wait for them when they have already motives enough, and more than enough, to bring them to God, if they would attend to them. While things go in their customary routine, they say they have not call enough to undertake a better course of life. When extraordinary events do take place, then they say that these events are after all mere ordinary ones, and do not constitute any special call of God to them. They reason away all that is remarkable

and peculiar, all that appears specially providential in such events, all that appears to point to a design of God in their behalf, all that seems to reveal a Divine Voice speaking to them in such events; they explain all this away to themselves, and will not allow themselves to receive the impression which such events would naturally make. No; it is only those who hear Moses and the prophets who are really persuaded by one rising from the dead; only those who obey ordinary calls who are really influenced by special providences when they do come. These have their hearts prepared to receive the impression which they ought to receive from any interruption of the routine of life. These are on the watch for the appearance of any sign of God's will as circumstances and the course of human affairs may reveal it, and therefore they are quick to perceive it, and to accept the indication as such. They profit by such calls to them; but the rest commonly make little of them, and are glad immediately to get rid of any temporary disturbance of their minds which they may cause. It is true such interpositions do sometimes awake even the most careless minds; but they are not to be depended on, or their effect calculated on beforehand. What we must depend on is to-day, while it is called to-day, as it is said, "To-day when ye hear His voice, harden not your hearts." "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation"—now when God speaks to us through the voice of conscience, through the Scriptures, through the example of Him who died for us, and through the examples of all His servants who have lived in His faith and fear.

*SERMON VII.*

# David Numbering the People.

"*And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.*"—2 SAMUEL xxiv. 1.

THE sin which David committed in numbering the people, of which we read in the text, is not like other sins which he committed, as, *e.g.*, the crimes of which he was guilty in the case of Bathsheba and her husband Uriah the Hittite—a sin which is quite plain and palpable on the face of it. We do not see immediately upon its being mentioned how it was that it was wrong in him to number the people; that is, in the modern phrase, to take a census of the population. We know that we have a census of the population taken in this country at certain intervals, and we do not think that it is at all wrong to take such a census; nor is it wrong. The reason why a census is taken now is to ascertain if the population has increased, and how much it has increased since the last census. This is the principal reason; and there are other collateral enquiries that are made with it, in order to ascertain the condition of the people on various points on which it is useful to know their state and progress. All this is not wrong; but, on the contrary, very proper and useful. What is the difference then between the cir-

cumstances of the children of Israel and our own, which made what is right with us wrong with them? I will endeavour to explain what it was, and I think you will see, when you have considered all the circumstances of the case, that David's numbering of the people was a very different act from a census of this day, because the same act is very different when done from different motives and under different circumstances.

Let us look then in the first place to the object for which this act was done. It was very clear what David had an eye to in numbering the people. It was one of those steps which the kings of the nations around, the chiefs of the heathen families of the earth (to whom the children of Israel were especially told not to make themselves like), were accustomed to take from time to time when they wanted to know how strong they were, and what wars they could carry on, what countries they could invade, and what cities they could take. That was the aim in the numbering of the people which the kings of the earth then took—an aim at power and spoil, at taking captives who were made slaves of, and robbing the great cities and capitals of other countries of all their wealth and ornaments, in order that the conqueror's own great city and capital might shine with ill-gotten splendour. This was the way of the heathen world, who, as I have said, the Israelites were specially bidden not to imitate. They were not meant by God to be a conquering nation, or to get a large empire, as the Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, and Romans did; they were a holy nation, a peculiar people, whom God had chosen for a particular

purpose; viz., to be admitted into a special covenant with Him, and to keep the deposit of the great prophecy of the Messiah until the fulness of time should come. "The Lord's portion was His people; Jacob was the lot of His inheritance."* "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all the people that are upon the face of the earth."† This was the calling of the people of Israel. "The Lord shall establish thee as an holy people unto Himself, as He hath sworn unto thee; and all the people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord."‡ It was then altogether contrary to the design of God that the Jewish nation should become an imperial nation, subjugating other nations; though all those nations I have mentioned, as having acquired great empires, started from quite as small beginnings as the Jews, nor was there anything to hinder the Jews from doing the same, and becoming what the Assyrians, the Medes, and Persians were, but that God had marked out a different course for them; who as His chosen people were ordained to be the instruments of great spiritual designs for the salvation of mankind, and not to be a mighty kingdom of the world. And therefore these numberings of the people which went on in the nations of the world, and which were simply counting of spears and estimates of military strength, were altogether unsuitable to a holy nation thus set apart from the rest of mankind. And David's act was, as I have said, one of these acts of numbering; it was an imitation of what

* Deut. xxxii. 9. † Deut. vii. 6. ‡ Deut. xxviii. 9, 10.

the heathen nations were in the habit of doing for the purpose described. There was a constant tendency in the children of Israel to imitate the ways of the heathen. We hear the warning voice of the prophets, from first to last, denouncing this yielding to surrounding influences and adoption of earthly standards. They could not see (the great mass of them) why they were to be so unlike every other nation, and to keep apart from all the world. "Why could they not do as other people did?" was what they asked, and in much in the same spirit in which many ask now.

This was the reason then why David's step was such a sin as it was. It was an act of common, or as I may call it, vulgar, kingly ambition, in absolute contradiction to the express designs of God for the Jewish people. We see that it was a counting of heads, in order that he might boast of the military strength of the chosen nation; as if such an aspect of the holy people was not radically false and profane, mixing up ideas which ought to have been divided religiously asunder. David as a monarch had his temptation to think of himself as a great monarch simply, and to form aims and plans such as other monarchs formed. He had evidently an eye to commencing a regular earthly policy for the Jewish nation. We cannot tell of course what particular scheme he may have had immediately before him then, but we see the spirit of the act. There was a spirit in it which the prophet Gad, David's seer, saw plainly enough. It was one of those first risings of a carnal national spirit, and a spirit of conquest, which was to be instantly denounced, otherwise it would get

ahead and change the aspect of the chosen people altogether. It pleased God by a terrible visitation at once to check this new temper, and suppress at its very commencement this dangerous aim, which would have utterly effaced the stamp of holiness which He had impressed on the Jewish nation, and have made them like any great earthly nation—Assyrians, Medes, or Persians. He would still retain them as the chosen people, and therefore by a destructive pestilence He brought them to their senses, awakened them to a sense of their real calling as His own peculiar people, and rescued the holy race from trying to make itself a great, ambitious, self-aggrandizing nation, in other words, from mingling with the world and being absorbed in heathenism; for this would have been the end of such a course.

Another reason why David's act was a sinful one, and very different from numbering of the people in our own day, was that it was done under a very different dispensation from that under which we live. The Jews were not only the people of God, in which character all Christian churches of this day are like them—for all Christians are the people of God—but they were under an extraordinary and miraculous dispensation. God was not only their God in heaven, but their King on earth too. He administered their affairs, and took charge of their interests. He ruled them by a succession of special providences. It was their privilege that they were not left to themselves and their own guidance, as nations mainly are now, but were governed by the Most High Himself, interposing with particular directions for particular occasions. Nations are not so

guided now, but we are left to provide for our own interests by the use of our natural foresight, and this extraordinary dispensation is over. But this special administration by God was the constitution of the Jewish state, just as we speak of what is our constitution; it was the form of government which God had instituted for them. Anything therefore that interfered with, or tended to set aside, this special divine sovereignty was treason, because the chosen people were not to set up governments and modes of policy for themselves as other nations did, or as we do now, but were to wait upon the voice of their Divine King. And therefore the act of setting up a king at all—I mean of choosing a man to be their king—was a sinful act on the part of the Israelites in the first instance, though it was permitted. The innovation was engrafted by the divine indulgence upon the original constitution; but it was a great innovation at first, and was denounced as such by Samuel, and brought a severe visitation upon the people, to stamp the recollection of the sin upon them. "And when ye saw that Nahash, the king of the children of Ammon, came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your King.... Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to-day? I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king."* And if it was wrong to have a

* 1 Sam. xii. 12, 16, 17.

king at all when the Lord was their king, still more was it wrong that the king of the people of God should set himself up as a great king of this world, like other kings, and begin to rule Israel in his own way, and to entertain schemes of carnal greatness, in order to convert the monarchy of the chosen nation into one of the great monarchies of the world. But this, as I have said, was the spirit of David's act of numbering the people, because it was counting his strength as a monarch, to see what he could do, and what great exploit he could perform, and how he could raise his own power and enlarge his dominions as king of Israel. This, I say, was specially wrong when the king of the chosen people was only king under a Divine King, and had no right to be constructing great plans out of his own head.

But though the sin in David's act of numbering the people does not apply literally to us and our circumstances as a nation, there is a sense, and a very true sense, in which it does apply to us. It applies to us as regards the motive and spirit of the act; for is there not a sin, and a very common sin, "of numbering," which we see now in other people and in ourselves? Are not people very fond of numbering—of numbering, in their own mind and thoughts at least, the good things they have, or suppose themselves to have? Are not people too fond of counting up their wealth, or their pleasures in prospect, or their honours, or their great acquaintances; their carnal treasures of some kind or other? Do not they number everything they have, even their knowledge and their virtues? And is not this the same thing in spirit as the sin of David in

numbering the people? He wanted to realize to himself how much power he had, what strength at command, how many soldiers he could bring into the field; and in the same way the carnal imagination of man always enjoys the thought and appreciation of its own advantages or pleasures, or fancied merits, or talents and powers—likes going over them, and enumerating them. The general survey is not enough; it must single them out one by one, and number them, in order to stimulate the inward relish more effectually, and feed the appetite to the full. What countings and numberings are there in the imagination of a covetous man, or a man of pleasure? How do all the good things of life, its treasures and sweets, pass in review before them continually? They do not like only the advantages themselves, but the thinking of them, and the reckoning them over; and this is the peril so formidable to the soul, to which our Lord refers when He says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also;" that is, you will be always brooding in your heart upon them, and they will fill your mind to the exclusion of all spiritual thoughts. The soul thus becomes a mere treasury of the flesh, and ceases to be a spiritual house for God to dwell in; it becomes wholly corrupted, and loses its proper nature. There are various instances of such numbering and counting in Scripture, and in none of them is the issue at all a happy one. Nebuchadnezzar numbered from the walls of Babylon all the lofty palaces and towers of that mighty city, and said to himself at the end of it, "Is not this great Babylon

that I have built?" And he was driven forth after that speech to eat with the beasts of the field. Sennacherib numbered to the men on the wall all the cities that he had destroyed, and asked, "Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?"* And that very night "the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand." Hezekiah numbered to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon all "his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not. . . . And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left."† The rich man in the parable counted the years that he was to enjoy his riches, and said, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."‡ The Pharisee numbered his good acts and merits, and said, "I am not an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

* 2 Kings xix. 13. † 2 Kings xx. 13–17. ‡ Luke xii. 18–20.

And he went to his house not justified; that is to say, condemned. Such is the issue of numbering in Scripture, and it reminds us that the numbering of the people by David is not the only kind of numbering condemned. The Bible, in short, condemns all resting upon self, all dwelling upon treasures and possessions of our own. It takes us out of ourselves, and directs us to God as the great object of our love, and, in Him, to our neighbour. It reproves the inclination to brood upon any fancied merits or resources of our own; for "all flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof is as the flower of grass: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our Lord endureth for ever." There is a sense in which we are to take thought for ourselves; but there is also a sense in which we are not to do so. As we are forbidden to be anxiously thoughtful, so we are forbidden to be covetously or vainglorioously thoughtful about the resources and advantages of life; for after all these things do the Gentiles seek. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Let us take the blessings which God sends us with thankfulness, and with content, but not convert them into materials of pride or boastfulness. And remember always that there is something much more important for which life is designed; viz., for obedience, trial, and the service of God and our brethren.

*SERMON VIII.*

# The Heroism of Faith.

"*Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*"—DANIEL iii. 18.

THE scene recorded in this chapter is one of the most sublime and majestic which the human mind can conceive. On the one side is represented human power in the grandest and most overwhelming form we can imagine. It is represented in the very form in which Divine power is represented in those mystical scenes in the book of Revelation. There is a throne, and upon it sits the greatest of the kings of the earth, a mighty monarch who had people, nations, and languages under his rule. He sits in state, which nothing in this world can surpass, surrounded by all the instruments of his power—the delegates who ruled in his name, and who were themselves kings in the eyes of the nations they were put over, though only servants of the great king—by the princes, the governors and the captains, the treasurers, the counsellors, and all the rulers of the provinces. The place is a vast plain —the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon—and the occasion which has caused this great gathering is the inauguration of a golden image, before which all

people, nations, and languages are commanded to bow down. So far we have a perfect impersonation of human power. On the other side we have three men who stand apart, and refuse to join in the act for which all the rest are met. They stand alone and isolated in the midst of the vast multitude. They stand erect while all the crowd is prostrate before the idol. They refuse to worship. They are reported to Nebuchadnezzar, the form of whose visage changes as he hears from their own lips their simple and plain refusal to do so. "Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Like a monarch whose will had hitherto been law, he had no idea of not being obeyed. He could not understand an individual will thus publicly opposing itself to his own, and his face expressed the blackness of wrath which intimated that to disobey him was death. That was the only alternative. When he gave a command, he could conceive no other; and when opposition came in so public a form as this, when he was defied before his whole assembled empire, that death must be instantaneous, and as horrible a one as could be devised.

This is the remarkable contrast which is brought out in this striking and wonderful scene. It is the contrast between spiritual greatness and human greatness. Each is complete, and the highest of its kind. On the one hand there is in the Assyrian monarch the idea of his own supreme greatness, of a will that is not to be resisted, the thought indeed of resistance to which is like the notion of resistance to a law of nature. He

thinks he has a natural indisputable right to control every one's action, conscience, and will, and the whole assembled population echoes that idea, and applauds it. That is the top of human greatness. On the other hand are three isolated men, mere atoms in this vast multitude, who do refuse this worship, who acknowledge a law in their own hearts higher than his, and who appeal to this law. "Be it *known unto thee* that we will not serve thy gods." Great words indeed, calm and respectful, but indicative of a fixed determination which defied all the power of man, and would not be subdued by the whole world.

We ask ourselves then what it was which gave these three men the power to withstand the will of this great monarch, this representative of the world and its greatness; to resist passively, but immovably, the overwhelming force of numbers, and stand firm though they were alone in the midst of an assembled world? And the answer is obvious. It was simply that they felt the importance of the truth for which they witnessed. They knew that they were upholding the true religion against the false. I suppose most people have some idea of what truth is; I mean of the rights and claims of truth, especially the deepest truth of all, that which is connected with religion. They have an idea that they themselves are in possession of some truth, that they know something—something which is important, sacred, and sublime—something which some others in the world do not know—relating to this great subject. But though they know that they have this treasure within them, how very little real price do they put upon

it! How little they feel that it is a valuable thing, that it is a treasure they are possessed of, ennobling and elevating those who have it, and worth standing up for. But this is just what the three men in the scene before us did feel; and this it was which enabled them to oppose the whole gathered empire of Babylon, the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, and the king Nebuchadnezzar himself. When we see a vast force resisted, the weight of the whole world withstood, we know that there must be a force in those who resist, that there must be force against force, and that they could not possibly stand firm against the overwhelming pressure unless they had a spring of strength within themselves, some fulcrum of their own to rest upon. That spring of strength then, and that support, was their feeling of the infinite dignity of divine truth, that it was something which they could not give up, but must uphold; that "a necessity," as St. Paul says, was laid upon them, and woe to them if they did not maintain it. Imagine a person who had not this strong inward sense of the value of divine truth, who was yet a professor of the truth, placed in this crowd before the throne of king Nebuchadnezzar, surrounded by his imperial court. Why such a person could no more stand his ground, against such an opposing array, than he could resist a mountain falling upon him and crushing him to atoms! How could he resist it? What force has he in him to do so? There must be some inward force to resist with. What force has he? He has none. He is a poor and weak creature in a spiritual sense, and he would collapse

in a moment, like an empty bladder; or he would fall at a touch, like a thing without any foundation. Such a man, indeed, to stand up against this overpowering array, to face a circle of mighty potentates with firmness! Their very looks would crush him, and deprive him of utterance; he would forget in a moment any faint resolve he might have made, and he would abandon at a word that truth the value of which he had never really felt. Whereas these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were able to withstand the rage and fury of the Assyrian monarch, and all the pride and power of Babylon, because they had this consciousness of being in possession of a great treasure in the truth for which they stood up.

Here then is the lesson the scene teaches us: it is the lesson that we have laid upon us the duty of witnessing to the truth; and that in order to be able to witness to the truth, we must have an inward perception of the value of the truth which is to be witnessed to. We are told particularly in Scripture that this is one of our great duties, as servants of God to whom He has specially revealed His will, and communicated the knowledge of divine truths. The whole Jewish nation was thus a commissioned witness to divine truth in the world, and was entrusted with the oracles of God, and with the knowledge of His true nature, for the very purpose that it might bear witness to this truth amid an idolatrous and corrupted world. And when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego bore witness, as they did in this striking scene, to the truth of the unity and spiritual nature of God, and against the worship of idols, they fulfilled

their special duty as Jews, and did what God had sent the Jewish people into the world to do. And we Christians, too, are told in Scripture that we are to be witnesses to the truth, as the Jews were to be, though to a higher truth than the Jews had. Our Lord Himself had this as one of His great offices: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."* And the Apostles were entrusted by our Lord with the same solemn function, and were commissioned especially to be witnesses of His resurrection—witnesses to the great truth of the immortality of the soul, and a life eternal beyond the grave. And St. John gives the same account of the apostolic mission: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."† And when the same Apostle relates as an evangelist the manner of our Lord's death, he refers specially to his office of witness: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."‡ And all Christians are invested in a measure with this office of witnessing to the truth of the Christian revelation—witnessing to it both in word and deed; confessing with the mouth that Jesus is the Son of God, that He was conceived of the

* John xviii. 37. † 1 John i. 1–3. ‡ John xix. 35.

Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, that He descended into hell, that He rose again the third day from the dead, that He ascended into heaven, that He sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and shall come again to judge the quick and the dead; confessing all this, and showing by their lives and demeanour in the world that they believe it, and do really look forward to a future life as that for which they were made, and which they were placed in this world to obtain. What is it but an office of witness which our Lord laid upon all His disciples when He said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven"? This is what we call the testimony of a good life; the effect which a Christian disposition and purpose in life have, as seen by others; and so serving to accomplish the object of making those others believe in the truth, when they observe the hold which it has upon you. For faith is a sympathetic thing. Faith begets faith; the faith of one man produces the faith of another man. When others see that you believe, that has of itself, by the very laws of our nature, a tendency and the very strongest tendency to make them think that what you believe is true.

And as Christians have the office imposed upon them of witnessing to the truth, so they are placed in a world which tries that office severely, and opposes great temptations to, and brings an overwhelming influence to bear against, the performance of that duty. The scene which is described in the book of Daniel is

indeed a symbolical one. It presents to us in figure the vast assemblage of the powers and influences of this world as they array themselves in opposition and for the suppression of the truth. History is used for our instruction; and this striking scene has been handed down to us on this very account, because, though a remarkable scene of actual history, it is still more important as a type. It is, in a word, a type of this visible world. It is true that the great Babylon which arrayed itself in majesty on that occasion, and set up its golden idol to worship in the plain of Dura—that great empire with its princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, councillors, and rulers of the provinces, and its mighty head, who thought himself little less than a god—has vanished and disappeared; gone ages ago to that vast abyss which absorbs one after another all the great things of earth—its empires and kingdoms; its peoples, nations, and languages; its courts, and dynasties, and great institutions; which looked at the time as if they were to last for ever. That Babylon has fallen; but there is another Babylon which still goes on, and always will go on, till Christ comes again to judgment. There is the overwhelming and overawing spectacle of this world, with its pomps and glories. That great show is going on, and will go on to the last. It is as imposing, and as carnally majestic, great, and sublime, as ever. Its look is lofty, and it speaks great things, and its vast array is ever before us. We cannot get away from it. Go where we will it follows us. It is a vision before our minds if not a sight before our eyes; it is the scene of Babylonian

power and greatness still going on, though in another form, and accommodated to every age in succession. And what a powerful influence does this world's visible array exert upon our minds! What a force does it apply to any one who comes within its reach, tending to overawe him, and suppress him as a witness to Divine truth! It is the very same influence which tried the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego on the plain of Dura. Doubtless they felt the commanding force of that great spectacle. They knew what power it indicated, and how completely they were setting themselves in opposition to the whole of a great empire. They had doubtless the feelings and the natural weaknesses of men, and those instinctive tendencies, which are in all of us, to bow to power, and to ally ourselves with the great and high of this world. It was the influence of the visible world which they resisted, when they resisted the power of the king of Babylon, and in the face of the whole concentrated majesty of Babylon witnessed to the truth.

Such being the office, then, which Christians have of witnessing to the truth, and such being the temptations under which they have to exercise this office, what is, as a matter of fact, the way in which this duty is performed? Do we find Christians showing by their lives, and by the objects they pursue here, their belief in eternity—witnessing to the great truth of the gospel dispensation, that our Lord by His resurrection from the dead brought life and immortality to light? Or do we not find that the great rule of all action adopted by them is to do as other people do, to think as other

people think, and to aim at getting what all other people strive to get? That is to say, do not the great mass of people do exactly the same thing that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have done, if at the proclamation of the herald, and at the sound of the sackbut, harp, psaltry, and all kinds of music, they had fallen down and worshipped the golden image? If people were asked now, if they were called to account by any prophet or divine messenger who had authority to do so, what one single part of their lives, or aim of their lives, or study of their lives, could the generality in very shame point to as a proof of a belief in eternity? They may abstain from vices which would bring upon them infamy, and they may shape their conduct generally so as to meet the standard of creditable conduct which prevails in society; but all this only shows a sense of what is due to their own respectability, and to the opinion of the world. This may be, and is, a very proper feeling; but this is all that is shown. There is nothing here which it requires a belief in eternity to account for and explain.

There is nothing here which a man might not do if he did not believe in eternity at all, and thought that his existence ended with this life. The desire to be thought a good member of society is natural to man, as a member of human society, as a member of this world. There is no spiritual aim or insight implied in it, no communion of the soul with God, no appeal to His Judgment-seat. What, I say, could the generality of men point to in their own line of conduct which would prove a belief in eternity as its motive cause, and

so be a witness to that eternity? The generality of men, I say, if they were pressed here, would find themselves in a difficulty; they would find it hard, if they were called upon, to name any one single object or purpose they pursue in life, or any one part of their whole conduct, which they could point to as a really satisfactory evidence of a belief in eternity. There is nothing which they could take their stand upon, and say, "That was a sacrifice; I have lost by it in this world, and therefore I could not have made it had I not truly believed in another world which would compensate me for it."

The office of witness, however, to Divine truth, rejected as it is by the generality, as if it were something more than could be expected of men, is a privilege as well as a duty, and brings, if it is faithfully executed, great rewards to those who execute it. It has its triumphs and joys far surpassing those of the world; for depend upon it nobody can conquer the world without an inward joy and triumph; and we know that to be a witness to the truth is to conquer the world, because it is to withstand the great power of its attractions, and the spells with which it would bind our souls. It is not to be overawed and carried away by the great show and splendid spectacle of the world; it is *not* to be overcome by the world. St. John says, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." The faith then which witnesses to the truth has a sense of victory in it. It comes out the best in the contest.

It was so on the occasion we have been considering. We cannot conceive indeed anything more sublime than the triumph of the three great witnesses in this chapter. It is one of the great triumphs of faith, one of those great anticipations of the final triumph of good over evil, which Scripture has recorded for our encouragement. There is the triumph of Moses over the Egyptians; there is the triumph of Elijah over the prophets of Baal; and there is the triumph of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over Babylon and its king. The men were bound, the furnace was heated, Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, impatient to see the men that dared to resist him consumed to ashes; the executioners had laid hold of them, and they were now in the very midst of the ascending flames; they were dead men, as every one thought, and their bodies had become dust; when on a sudden a sight appeared which astonished every eye, and made the monarch rise up in haste and disorder. They had "cast three men bound into the midst of the fire;" but "Lo!" said the king, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Sublime manifestation indeed of Divine power, and one that must have produced confusion and consternation in every heart and countenance, showing how the very grandest display of human power must melt like wax before the presence of the Lord. What a sudden humiliation of the mighty powers of earth, what an instantaneous evidence of their nothingness! "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His

majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. . . . . And the idols He shall utterly abolish."* Where was the golden image now that had thousands falling down before it? Where were the proud looks of Nebuchadnezzar, his rage and fury? The strength of the whole earth was gone in a moment, in the presence of One Who was walking in the midst of the fire, and Whose form was like the Son of God.

Here was indeed a triumph of that faith which bears witness to the truth; and, as I have said, this scene is symbolical. It does not end with itself; it is the figure of a deep truth which holds now, and which we may apply to ourselves. Men reject everywhere the office of witnessing to Divine truth; they throw it off as an obstacle, a shackle, and a burden, something that stands in their way, and prevents them from being friends with the world and from getting on in the world. They know the truth, but they will not witness to it. They know that the world is transitory, and they act as if it were eternal; they know eternal life is a truth, and they act as if it were a dream. The truth is known, then, but it must be hidden. It must be buried under the ground; it must not be witnessed to; it must not be shown by the evidence of life and action. Yet we may venture to say, and with certainty, that never, on any occasion, by any one of the humblest servants of God, was this office of witness to the truth executed without a reward. Never in this mixed world did a

* Isaiah ii. 10, 11, 18.

single Christian soul offer to God the sacrifice of a practical confession of Him, by standing apart from the ways of the world—not accepting its voice, not yielding to its spells or being overawed by its show; never did any one face any measure of adversity, or gloom, or isolation, or deprivation, as the consequence and penalty of bearing witness to Divine truth, and expressing that truth in action, but he had, like the three witnesses of whom we have read to-day, in that adversity a companion; there was another in the fire walking with him, and that other was the Son of God. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." "He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." This is the Gospel recompence for obedience; it is the manifestation of the Divine presence within us, the awakening of the soul to the knowledge of God, and to such a sense of the supreme value of His approbation and comfort in Him as a witness and judge of our heart, as makes amends for any loss we may sustain. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." We know that "all things work together for good to them that love God," and this is "the hope that maketh not ashamed."

*SERMON IX.*

# Proverbs.

"*The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel.*"
PROVERBS i. 1.

THERE is great variety in the books of Scripture. Some are historical, and give instruction by examples: some are prophetical, and both foretell future events, and also preach righteousness:—for the prophets were preachers as well as prophets. Some are collections of psalms, sacred songs, and hymns. The book of Proverbs is very different from all these. It consists for the most part of short sayings, containing each some deep and useful truth. A proverb is some or other particular truth respecting life and morals, expressed in the shortest way. There are collections of proverbs in all countries, and they enter into the popular language and conversation of all nations. They are an inheritance which we receive from our forefathers. Who were the authors of all the wise proverbs that pass current among us we do not know, but we may suppose that they originated in some such way as this: When a man had often observed a thing, when he had seen many examples of it, when he had seen first this man and then that man exhibiting the evidence of it in his life,

and in the happiness or misery of that life, he then put the two things together, and said, "It is always so," and he made a proverb of it. He had often observed, let us say, that men who think very highly of themselves, and despise others, come at last to misfortune, and sink lower even than those whom they had all their life looked down upon; he had seen that their very overweening confidence in themselves had made them despise precautions which other people took, and that this led to signal reverses. Having observed it then so often, he made a proverb of it, and said, "Pride goes before a fall." For this, though a proverb of Scripture,* is also a current saying of human wisdom. Again, when people were particularly struck by some virtue, its excellence and beauty, they called men's attention to it by a proverb; when they were particularly struck by some fault, they did the same. Different things strike different persons according to the character of their minds and their situations in life. It is the truths which they happen themselves to have observed which enter deepest into people's minds, which they brood over, which they muse upon, which they carry with them in their thoughts, which they are always testing by their recurring experience, and which they treasure up in their storehouse within. They are always applying and exercising, so to speak, these truths. There is something in truth, in truth which we have ourselves observed or experienced, which lays hold upon us; it is much prized simply because it is understood, it is part of that wisdom, be it more or less, which God has given

* See Proverbs xvi. 18.

us. Truth is powerful. Whenever it is really seen and felt it makes a deep impression on us; we admire it, we converse with it, nay, we are captivated by it, and love it because it is truth. We are won by the simplest truth, if we only really perceive it. It goes to our hearts, it strikes home, as being truth, because God has made us of a nature to love truth. It was in this way, then, that proverbs arose. Pious and good men took those truths which they observed themselves in the actions of men and the course of Providence, and made proverbs of them. They gave the rest of the world the benefit of their experience; they said, "We can vouch for this being true, because we have seen it; we have seen it constantly, time after time; you may depend upon it, because it is not a mere idea, it is a fact." And this is the reason, perhaps, why proverbs are as popular as they are; because they are the results of real experience. Thus the psalmist says, "I have been young, and now am old, and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken." That is an appeal to his own experience, and it has its peculiar effect upon us as such. He tells us that this is the fact, that he has seen it, that he knows it to be true, that he has never come across a single exception to it—that the righteous are not forsaken, but that even in their greatest adversity they receive support, raised up for them, in one quarter or another, by their Father in heaven. When he tells us of his own experience, we listen, and listen in confidence. "I have been young, and now am old," he says. We listen to the lesson of a long life as to the voice of wisdom; we do not doubt it. We take this promise to our hearts, and

rely upon it as the conclusion of inspired experience; we repose upon it, and look forward cheerfully to its proving true in our case, if we only lead that good life which is the condition of it. There is a music in the truths of a deep experience like this, which soothes our uneasiness, quiets our apprehensions, and sets us at rest with respect to Divine Providence: which stops our anxious surmises, forebodings, questionings; which speaks peace; which tells us that all will be right at last.

And as proverbs are the results of the experience of others, so they in return confirm and fall in with our own experience. And this is another reason why proverbs are so popular. We find our observation and reflection so often concurring with them. We remark from time to time particular things, and often the same things again and again. We feel impressed by the experience we have gathered, and while we are so impressed, perhaps, an old proverb occurs to us which expresses exactly the same experience. We are then confirmed in our knowledge when we find that all this has been observed before, and made a saying of, and that we have been thus enabled to enter into the sayings of the wise, and feel their force and wisdom. Thus Solomon calls proverbs "the words of the wise, and their dark sayings." They are often dark to us; *i.e.* they have no particular meaning, and we do not attach any idea to them until something that we ourselves observe throws light upon them, and the great truth and justice of them is brought out by the facts of our own experience.

Proverbs then being so natural a form for truth to be put in, and having such a place in human language and conversation, the Bible accommodates itself to this want, and puts a great many of its moral truths and exhortations in the shape of proverbs. The book of the Proverbs of Solomon is a collection, under the guidance of inspiration, of the short sayings of wise and pious men which up to that time had been more or less current; with many of course of his own intermixed. Being so wise a man, he saw the great effect which these short and pithy sayings had upon men; how they recollected them when they could not recollect longer exhortations; how they admired even the mode in which they expressed, in so very short a compass, very large results of experience. He thought it a pity that the conclusions of so many deep experiences should be lost. For it must be remembered that sometimes a proverb may be the gathered-up and collective result of the experience of a whole life; it may represent the one principal thing which a very sagacious man saw in human life, and which he picked out of the whole circle of his observations as that which most struck him. What a waste it had been then, had the short expressions of these deep perceptions been lost! When we have them before us we seem to have an insight into the minds of the very wisest of men, we almost commune with them, and know the point of view in which they regarded human life and all its affairs.

We see, *e.g.*, the estimate they formed of human nature, its weakness and corruption. This is one great

lesson they teach. How full the book of Proverbs is of the folly of mankind! One note pervades it. It is a mournful note; but it is a warning note. Who is that "fool" of which we hear so much in the Proverbs, who is always coming in with some short description appended to him—"whose way is always right in his own eyes;" "who despiseth his father's instruction;" who "hateth reproof;" whose "lips enter into contention;" whose "mouth is his destruction;" who "returneth to his folly as a dog returneth to his vomit;" who "trusteth in his own heart;" "who uttereth all his mind;" who "maketh a mock at sin"? Who is this personage, who is so self-satisfied, so without all self-control or self-distrust, so confident, such a creature of the present moment, without seriousness, without fear, without foresight, with nothing in him which tells him of a future which is coming, and warns him of his danger? Is not this a very common character we meet with in the world? Are we not often reminded of the "fool" of Solomon's description?

Again, what a vast collection of sayings we have in this book relating to human life, to human duty, the fear of God, charity to man, modesty, humility, forbearance, industry, self-denial! Here we see that another plain use and design of the whole book is to give us a quantity of short and summary expressions of deep truths of practice, such as we can carry about with us, and call to mind when we want them. This is the particular convenience of proverbs. They are intended to recur to us, and to come into our minds when we are in any course of occupation, when we are under any

trial, when we have any dealings with others in which we are tempted to go aside from the strict path. These sayings then are mementos to us, ready at hand to keep us straight; to place some great truth before us, to fill our minds and displace all those paltry narrow expedients which are apt to suggest themselves to us—expedients opposed to the real voice of conscience. What a proverb, *e.g.*, is that to carry into the details of business and trade—"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is His delight." A man is tempted to cheat his customer, or at any rate to take some slight unfair advantage, which he perhaps does not consider real cheating, but only a fair liberty of trade. At such a moment would not this proverb occur to him with great force, and might not its sharp and clear and solemn voice stop him in the very act? Would it not say to him, that however he might disguise such an act to himself, it was sin; that what God required was justice, and that He was content with nothing short of that?

Or when angry, or spiteful, or covetous thoughts come into our minds, and we are tempted to encourage their presence, and brood upon them, would not the sudden recollection of that proverb, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," have an effect upon us? Would it not be a solemn note of warning, telling us that the inward state of minds, and what we allowed to go on there, was a most critical thing; and if we let ourselves run loose in our thoughts, the result would sooner or later be seen in our acts, and that we should fall into some great outward sin which would disgrace us in the eyes of God and man? Or

when a man is tempted by bad company to commit some sin, and he is undecided—afraid to resist his companions, and yet reluctant to violate his conscience—does not the proverb come into his mind with peculiar force—"If sinners entice thee, consent thou not"? What a common case is this, and how solemnly does the proverb speak to those who are in this case!

How often, again, do men diverge from the line of their task—go aside from the path of their appointed duty—to linger near some object of pleasure, not wholly perhaps giving up their duty, but tampering with it! What does Solomon say to such a man? "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." See nothing but the thing which is given you to do; do not look at anything on the right or on the left; keep a guard over your eyes, and do not allow any little object on one side or the other to divert you. He speaks with even a more awful and threatening voice to the abandoned idler: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard." It is a saying to rouse a man, and bring him to his senses. Again, the beginnings of sin are very attractive; all the pleasure and excitement are before us; the issue of it is hid, and in the background. But what is the proverb which applies to this state of things? "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." What could place the whole truth before us more vividly? It gives us in one moment the clearest insight into the ways of Providence. Persons again who are engaged in toilsome duties, which do not immediately reward them, and which separate them from scenes of

gaiety, are apt to look jealously at times on the high spirits, mirth, and enjoyments of the pleasure-seeking and volatile class. They say to themselves, "There are those people enjoying themselves, and I have nothing of the kind to cheer me." But what does Solomon say? It is a saying which shows his knowledge of human nature; speaking, with a depth of tone which is indescribable, to our very hearts, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Is not this a proverb to remember when we see people living in foolish excitement, and apparently in happy contrast with the grave lot of more righteous men? The proverb prevents us from being deceived by a mere surface; it tears away the mask, and shows us what inward corroding pain and uneasiness at heart there is, under all this show of happiness.

I might go on much longer, but a few examples are enough to show the deep truthfulness of the Proverbs of Solomon, and how adapted they are to keep us straight, by recurring to us at the proper time; and by being in such a form that we can carry them with us in our thoughts, and recall them at a moment's notice. Let us not neglect the assistance then of this great and remarkable book, but refresh our memories by turning to it from time to time; and endeavour to keep these sayings in our minds, to be a support to us when we need it. This book will imprint upon our minds the great truths of God's providence, and the profundity of God's judgment. It will teach us to look below the surface, to see signs and warnings where the vain and the foolish do not see them, to give a meaning

to a thousand daily events which we are apt to pass by without notice, and to look for a future verification of Divine justice when we are apt to test everything only by present pleasure and success. In this way this grave and weighty book of the Old Testament fits in with the lessons and revelations of the New. At present much is hid, and much happens the reverse of what justice desires; but a day comes when there will be a correction of this disorder, and when the issue of another life will verify and clear up the Divine wisdom, with a fulness of which the Old Testament gives us these first notices and anticipations. The Proverbs show a divine justice already partially commenced and exhibited in this life; and the Gospel carries out this view, and completes it in the world of futurity.

## SERMON X.

# The Teaching of Events.

"*With my spirit within me will I seek Thee early: for when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*"—ISAIAH xxvi. 9.

WHAT a lesson do the events of the world teach us, as they go past us day after day, week after week, and year after year! And every one must feel that there are some which are special and remarkable lessons. They strike us, they fasten on us; we feel that we get something from them, that we gain an experience, a sense of the reality of some truth which we had not before. Even God's word does not teach us or make us understand truths without this teaching of events. This is what we mean when we talk of experience, and say that we cannot really know anything without experience. We say this in worldly things, and we must say it in spiritual things too. Nobody gains a spiritual state of mind without this teaching; events strike him, and give a whole turn to his thoughts. Nor need they be always such as relate to himself, though these have a special power of instruction when they are of a nature that brings pain and humiliation; but they may be events relating to others, either public, or remarkable events in private life.

The Bible is pervaded by this teaching of events. When the Israelites saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore, that was an event, independently of their own rescue, most forcibly to affect the whole people. It was the pride of a great people laid low. "Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters." How awful must have been that spectacle! What a lesson never to be forgotten! So when one man, Goliath, fell by a stone from the shepherd's sling, what a sight was that! It was the pride of strength laid low. How must the fall of the blaspheming boaster have spoken to the whole multitude! Words were not wanted; they saw the judgment of God in the death of the giant under the stripling's hand. And so when Samson perished, and all the lords of the Philistines perished with him. That was an event that told them how little good the ill-regulated strength of man does him, when he abandons himself, like Samson, to mere impulse, and becomes headstrong and inconstant. What a lesson was this! What an evidence of the weakness of man in himself, though he has the strength of an army, that the mighty Samson could destroy thousands, but could not save himself. And so when Saul fell by his own sword in Gilboa, David sung, "How are the mighty fallen!" and the words became a proverb to all generations. We know the great and terrible judgment which befell the vast Assyrian army. The holy city was in the greatest extremity of alarm, and it seemed as if it must be crushed at one blow by the invading host, when the word of the Lord came, "I will defend this city;" and

the angel of the Lord came, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. That was an event, and a teaching event. It explained itself, and required no help from words. Judah was to think of it—muse upon it; it was enough to make any well-disposed Jew serious for life.

This is indeed the kind of teaching which we require by our nature. We are, as it were, children, and we must be taught like children; and therefore it is that God teaches us by His providence as well as by His word. We know generally as a truth, *e.g.*, the vanity and fleeting nature of earthly things; but should we not forget it, were we not every day reminded of it by facts which come before us? Truth must be renovated, must be made fresh to us every day by being embodied in some event which strikes us,—which arrests our attention, which appeals to our hearts,—or it will become dead to us. We shall quite lose sight of it. It is not enough for us to know simply, we must have that which makes an impression upon us, as children are taught by pictures; and these impressions must be constantly renewed. The events of life and of the world are what make these recurring fresh impressions on our minds. They are constantly bringing this particular truth home to us. Does not every day bring forth its warning fact? The newspaper, the post, the passing tidings, bring it. We can hardly go from morning to evening without Providence renewing and reviving truth. If men take the right path, an argu-

ment every day turns up to confirm them in it; some event that happens. A perpetual natural argument goes on.

Isaiah, from whom the text is taken, is the inspired writer who lays most stress upon the teaching of events; he is indeed penetrated by this teaching; he is full of the lesson. He has before him, more than any other prophet, the last Judgment, and this is one reason we read him in Advent. Advent preaches the commemoration of the first coming of our Lord, and the first coming of our Lord is the herald of His second coming. The prophet is full of a great fall which is to come some day to all human pride—of a great ruin in prospect. He writes with this vision always before his eyes; and this great distant Judgment of the fall of the world colours his descriptions of intermediate lesser judgments and events. He looks upon everything from this point of view. Through all the overthrows of kings and armies, of cities and governments, of high towers and fenced walls, he hears the last trumpet sounding. He preaches, like the Apostle, about the approach of the end of all things. He says that the end will come at last, and that in the meantime every catastrophe that takes place in the world is a type of it. The burden of Moab, the burden of Tyre, the burden of Syria, the burden of Egypt, the burden of Babylon! when Tyre is overthrown, when Egypt is smitten, when Damascus is a ruinous heap, when Moab is laid waste, when Ephraim is trodden down, when Babylon is in the dust; all these events foreshadow the final Judgment in his eyes.

Isaiah is thus a teacher from events—from the course of things here. It is true some of these events are in the distance, but they are not the less present to the prophet's mind; he plants himself in the time in which they are to happen; he has before his eyes the people then to be the spectators of them; and he tells them to learn, from these facts of Providence, to think and look before them; he tells men such events ought to make them sober and serious in spite of themselves—to chasten their vanity and levity, and to subdue their pride. It is this kind of serious and grave reflection, then, which is expressed as taking place in his own mind in the text: "With my spirit within me will I seek Thee early: for when Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Mark his language: "With my spirit within me." *Within me*, he says; that is the language of the human heart upon any great stroke of Providence, upon hearing of any striking or solemn event in public or private life. We hear of such events, sometimes suddenly enough, in the midst perhaps of the hurry of business or of pleasure, when we least expect it, and we immediately say to ourselves, "This is something to think over, to carry with one into one's chamber, and keep a long time in one's mind. There is much to extract from it. The first impression is weighty enough, but I shall see more and more in it as I think upon it." This is that process of musing of which the psalmist speaks: "I will muse upon all Thy works."* "I remembered Thine everlasting judgment."†

* Psalm cxliii. 5. † Psalm cxix. 55.

And Isaiah expresses it in these words, "With my spirit within me I will seek Thee early."

It need not be a kingdom falling; the fall of one man is enough. When a great man falls, though it be by the hand of death, which sooner or later lowers all in common, the news strikes upon us with a solemnity and force which dismisses all lesser thoughts and cares. He was prosperous; he was strong; he had his own way in the world; everything succeeded with him; everything yielded to him; he was just the specimen we should have selected of a fortunate man; he excited the jealousy of the world—but now he is no more! There is something in these contrasts which is overpowering, which stops the current of human thought, stills every trivial motion within, takes us out of ourselves and tranquillizes us by its own weight. Does it not appear sometimes, when some such solemn event takes place, that the matter of it is inexhaustible, that we could muse and muse upon it for ever without coming to an end of the lesson? The same sort of event in private life has even greater influence, because it is nearer to us, and strikes home. What a train of associations accompanies one person often, when he has been one of our neighbourhood, our own circle, and still more when he has been one of our own family! And when he is taken away, how immediately the mind is thrown back upon the whole past and absorbed, not in an idle or worldly, but a thoughtful dream; in which, in a sense, God speaks to us, and in which we commune with our own hearts and are still, feeling every moment truths which we had forgotten brought home to us!

Certainly there are events (everybody has instances within his own experience, and they are of many kinds) which speak in a way in which nothing else can speak to us—events which make us mute; when it seems as if talking were idle, and we could only look on and think and wonder. There is neither speech nor language, but their voice is heard.

It is indeed in this way only, by subduing and absorbing us, that the thought of death in general, and the universal decay of things here, becomes not a wholly bitter reflection, and has a certain soothing and tranquillizing effect instead of a melancholy one. We are distracted by a constant succession of fretting and disturbing thoughts—trivial agitations, which we cannot get rid of; and, wearied with the continual warfare, we are glad of the presence of any powerful and master thought which can for a time, and while it lasts, put down the tumult within us. The interval of repose is grateful, though it be not without sadness. The actual apprehension of our own death must indeed be grievous, at least at first; but the general thought of death, and of the end of all things, is not, I say, without its meditative satisfactions; and for this reason; viz., that it gives us repose. It immediately sets a quantity of uneasy motions in our hearts at rest; it calms the stir, and produces an even surface upon the waters. Within the enclosure of that deep thought all is at rest. We are safe from intrusion, and no trifling and annoying visitor can enter. We are tranquil within its precincts as within a harbour which shelters us from the wind and the sea. It is indeed a tranquillizing idea, because

it is an overpowering one. If it has a sadness, it has at the same time a greatness which overcomes us, and stills us by overcoming us. In the vast pagan world of the East at this moment a hundred millions of people worship death. They have made a deity of it; and they fall on their knees before it, and exalt it to the stars as the very god of this world, and supreme in all nature. They build temples, and they offer sacrifices to it. And why? Because the erring and distorted minds which founded that religion saw in death the supreme visible power of this world which conquered everything, and allowed themselves to be wholly absorbed and entranced in the idea of it. They could think of nothing else, and fastened upon it as the all in all. That is not the Christian mode of thinking upon death, because the Christian mind is not onesided. It takes in all the dispensations of God—life as well as death—and profits by them all, by the activities of life, by the prescience of death. The gospel does not allow us to dwell on death except as a transient event, which is to give way to another life, and to be followed by a resurrection. This pagan worship is the fruit of a wild extravagance of meditation upon this great fact, and of the morbid obliquity of minds which exhausted themselves in dwelling upon this one idea to the exclusion of others, —the minds of sages, but of heathen sages who were carried away and lost in the gulf of their own reflections, sinking in that unfathomable abyss which they attempted to penetrate.

Still the superstition to which I am referring shows the powerful attractions of this subject of meditation—

how its presence drives away other thoughts, and imparts a kind of rest.

We have spoken of Isaiah as the prophet who specially teaches from facts; who awes, and solemnizes, and chastens, by the instrumentality of the great truths of experience. He would have us muse upon events, take in the instruction which they convey, and let it sink in our minds. All history becomes under his interpretation a revelation of the Divine justice; the whole of human life a dispensation to educate us, to make us wise, to make us watchful, to make us sober. How does the prophet dwell upon the elation and insolence of man in his prosperity! What perception he has of the various forms of human pride, the luxurious, the disdainful, the boasting, the rapacious, the tyrannical; symbolized by the high mountains, the trees that are lifted up, the high tower and the fenced wall, the idols and the pleasant pictures, the lofty looks of great men, the mincing walk and tinkling feet of the haughty daughters of Zion; and all to end in the day of the Lord of hosts—that day when the new wine mourneth, the voice languisheth, all the merry-hearted do sigh, the mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth; "when joy is darkened, when the mirth of the land is gone, when the city is left to desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction!" Persons are apt too much to separate spirituality of mind from the teaching of ordinary life, and the lessons which the facts of this world convey. Undoubtedly the mind may be spiritualized without this teaching, and even before it can

be had; at the same time, in the case of the great majority of mankind, the spiritual temper is not attained without this teaching. The events of the world are the instrument in God's hand for spiritualizing the mind, and putting it into that train of thought and reflection which sobers it, and by imparting those emotions softens it, and makes it tender. In the common instance I have already taken—the fall of a great man—what a moral is in it! Indeed we are all naturally struck by it. It makes us pause, at any rate for a moment, in the bustle of life, and say to ourselves, "All is vanity." And at the time we feel that it is so; that is to say, it puts us into a spiritual state of mind; it makes us, whether we will or no, religious for a short interval. Such is the power of the teaching of events; it is at the time irresistible; and we are taken captive, and stop our every-day thoughts to ponder upon life and eternity, and to wonder at ourselves—at the hold this life has upon us: "I went by, and, lo! he was gone. I sought him; but his place could nowhere be found." There may indeed be a latent, unconscious sense of satisfaction in the impressions which the death of one of the world's great men imparts; it makes us feel, as it were, on a level with him. And there is, as we know, what has been called the luxury of pity. We may speculate how far human frailty may not mingle with these contemplations; still, on the whole, we gain from them the truth of the nothingness of what is transitory compared with what is eternal. And this is a most spiritualizing truth.

This, then, is what Isaiah teaches: "When thy

judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." He specially adopts the principle of spiritualizing by experience, and takes his standing-ground upon events, making them speak to us with a spiritualizing power. And this mode of teaching applies to the smaller as well as the greater class of events. The prosperous man becomes elated; elation produces carelessness, and carelessness ruin. That is the history of thousands; and Isaiah bids us see in the familiar course, a revelation of the will of God and a figure of the great Judgment, when all pride shall be brought down, when all lofty looks shall be humbled. The world thus rightly read and rightly apprehended becomes its own antidote. The world is the great tempter, but at the same time it is the great monitor. It stimulates our pride by its pomp and show, its fleeting honours and prizes; it goads men to the race, and inspires them with covetousness and rapacity; but, on the other hand, it is the great memento and evidence of its own vanity, and of the emptiness of everything which it offers to us. It is the great saddener, the great warner, the great prophet. It prophesies, like Balaam, in spite of itself, on God's side; it takes up its parable against itself, and tells us things to come—what the latter end of Edom shall be, what the latter end of Amalek shall be, that the Kenite shall be wasted, that Assur shall be afflicted, that Eber shall perish for ever. Isaiah is the prophet who beyond any other makes a prophet of the world; makes it prophesy for the sake of the elect, and for their instruction and education. He is the great teacher of the

patient, the chastised, the subdued mind—the mind that is taught by facts. He bids us extract out of every event its own lesson, and not to forget it; not to let it go when the moment has passed, but to let it settle upon us, penetrate within us, give a turn to our thoughts, a direction to our life. He bids us attain spirituality of mind by a proper use of our experience and observation of the grand course of the Divine government in the world. And he encourages us with the certainty that by this experience we shall also gain hope, according to the apostolic saying, "Patience worketh experience, and experience, hope." Though all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens be rolled together as a scroll, yet God will "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees." "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence."* He tells us of a new heaven and a new earth. He lifts up our minds above this world and all its events to the last closing scene of prophecy, when the "sun shall no more go down; neither shall the moon withdraw itself: but the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended."

* Isaiah xxxv. 4.

*SERMON XI.*

# Growing Worse.

"*The last state of that man is worse than the first.*"
MATTHEW xii. 45.

NOW I will ask first, Is there not something from which we shrink back, not only with repugnance, but with a kind of horror, in the idea of being really worse beings now than we were at a former point in our lives? We are accustomed to entertain this thought with respect to others, and we have many sayings on the subject—how failings grow upon persons; how bad habits get a firmer hold over them; how if men do not get better they get worse, and the like; but when it comes to ourselves, that we may have actually altered for the worse, it comes not only as an unpleasant thought, but as a kind of impossible thing. It is so very strange a thought to us. It is more than that; we do not like to confess it, we cannot believe it on account of the fact appearing so strange to us, and being so much out of all our reckoning. We allow that we may not be better than we were—that is a thought all are familiar with; but that we should be worse, have fallen below what we were before—it seems inadmissible. We refuse to entertain the idea. We feel as if we

could not seriously think so. It seems an impossibility. With respect to ourselves, we take it for granted that if we alter at all we alter for the better; that at any rate we are the same that we were, no worse. This is a very deep-seated delusion, assuming as a matter of course that there is only this alternative —that we need only think of alteration on one side, never in our own case of such a thing as alteration for the worse;—thinking we must always have whatever goodness we ever had, that that is at any rate safe; that if we can increase it, it is a gain, but that we cannot lose any of it, that it is part of our nature like our souls themselves; and that we need not concern ourselves about that; in a word, that we cannot alter for the worse. This is one of those prejudices of self-love that grow up with us. We are partial to ourselves, and do not see the truth in our own case. Yet there is something we may learn, a truth which ought to strike us, to be got even out of this extreme reluctance to admit the idea in our case of altering for the worse. It is this, the utterly unnatural character of the change, unnatural, I mean, taking our nature in the sense of what God made us for. It is evidently a shock to us, the very thought that we ourselves may have undergone this dreadful change—that of being worse beings than we were: it is an inversion of the proper course of things, a turning everything upside-down: it is in contradiction to the whole design of our creation. Better that a mill-stone were hanged about our neck, and that we were drowned in the depth of the sea, than that we thus became lower and

worse than our former selves. "If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment." This is said of those who, having been better, become worse, and lose the goodness they once had. And our Lord, after describing a peculiar change of condition which the person in the parable had undergone, says, "The last state of that man is worse than the first," as if that were the most dreadful thing that could be said of man.

Such being the difficulty, however, of admitting the possibility in our own case of a real change for the worse, I would observe that when this thought comes across us we must be on our guard against this extreme partiality to ourselves; we must not dismiss it in an off-hand way, but really go into the question, and confer with ourselves upon it. And, to aid this self-examination, I will offer some observations by way of evidence how much easier this unfavourable change in us is than we suppose; how insensibly faults increase; how much deeper, and more inward and penetrating, sin becomes if it is cherished at all. Nor need we take the instances of the grosser vices; for it is not these alone which corrupt the character. There are others which poison the soul just as effectually.

It must be remembered that we all begin with certain faults; different persons with different faults. What we mean by a man's character getting worse is, that these faults in us strengthen and increase. But is it an unaccountable and a strange process, that by which faults thus grow? By no means. It is the simplest

process in the world; it is simply by repeating the faulty action or humour time after time. If we do the same thing again and again, which we shall do unless we are on our guard, if we simply do the same thing again and again, the faulty temper grows and becomes stronger by this very repetition. We have only to go on in the same way, and at the end of the time we have a worse fault; for that is the nature of habit, that it grows by mere repetition of the same conduct, and becomes a stronger habit. But if the sinful habit is stronger, then the man is a worse man. There are indeed lighter failings which may grow upon a man, who may yet be improving substantially and in the main, but serious faults, which stain the soul and affect the whole character, cannot grow without the man becoming a worse man.

This is the way, then, in which persons become worse. There is nothing inexplicable in it, nothing even which is at all difficult to understand. It is the most simple operation—only doing the same thing, going on in the same temper, without any interruption to break up the course of evil. Any interruption, any awakening of conscience, whether from within or from without, gives us the opportunity of retracing our steps, undoing our sad work, and unloosing the bonds of our souls; but without any interruption, then, by simply going on in the same temper, we get worse; our character hardens in that evil direction, whatever it may be, in which it is bent.

To give an instance, let us take a man in an early stage of life, when he is just entering upon his course,

when there is this or that bad tendency in him, but soft and yielding, not yet hardened by habit. He is an unformed man as yet, and nature in him has as yet much of its freshness and spring, much of its freedom, much of its largeness; he is not swallowed up in one aim and passion; he seems open to all sorts of good and holy influences from all quarters. But still we observe in him, let us say, a certain want of generosity in money matters. He is close, as we call it; disposed to be overnice in his own favour in calculating the claims of others upon him, reducing them to as low a point as is consistent with bare justice, and always of two alternatives taking the less liberal one. We might observe, I say, this temper in him if we were thrown in his way, and had much to do with him, otherwise it would not attract notice; and when noticed it only appears a moderate defect in the midst perhaps of many good qualities. But now take that man twenty years hence, and what has this defect in him become? Avarice. Scripture expressly puts avarice among those sins which shut a man out of heaven: "Neither thieves," says the Apostle, "nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."* Do not all sins exclude from the kingdom of God? Yes, if they are not given up and repented of; but some sins differ from others in being more difficult to give up. A man in their grasp is like a man bound in fetters; his sin is the master of him, rules him, and does not let him go for an instant. Such a sin is avarice. It possesses a man with the idea of the

* 1 Cor. vi. 10.

absolute necessity there is that his property should increase, that one sum should produce another, and another another, and so on for ever. Any stop is misery to him; it must always be going on, this increase and addition; the desire of always having more than he has is essentially insatiable, because the want is always ahead of the acquisition, whatever it is. It is this power which money has over the man that makes us say that money is his god. It is his god, because it has complete control over him; he is absorbed in this (as it appears to him) necessity of his being, that what he has should always be increasing. He is in the gripe of a horrible delusion, out of which he cannot extricate himself; he cannot look at life except in this light. It is like some nightmare, some deception we labour under in a dream, when we think with our imperfect reason that we must do something or other, and that there is an argument for doing it which we cannot resist; the whole fancy being the mere mistake of a dream. We have a phrase that a man is under the fatal necessity of doing something. This is what avarice makes a man feel. It inspires him with the notion of this necessity that he must be making money; it has the power of what we call fate over him.

It seems to us impossible, then, that this man should not think and know himself to be a worse man than he was; that he should not know that he was an altered man, and altered sadly. But does he know it? He has not the least idea of it. It never occurs to him to suppose that he is not the same man that he always was. If

any one were to put the question to him, he would reply at once, "I am not altered at all; I am the same that I always was." Whatever appearance of difference there may be between himself now and himself at a former time he accounts for by circumstances. He is in a different situation now, and persons must do what is agreeable to their situation. He has a family to provide for; he has appearances to keep up; he has competitors in business whom he must keep pace with; a great deal is expected of him; he is in the way of making money, and he must make the best of his opportunities while they last.

To take another instance. We knew one, we will say, when he was much younger and only entering upon his trial, who was too quick in retaliating, too sensitive about himself. We see this often in younger persons; and if we notice it particularly in any one, still we do not think so much of it. It is only his turn of character; and he may have some good points to make up for it. But the reason why the failing is so mild is that it is only young as yet. Wait till it is old, and then see what it has grown into. Let an interval of some years pass, and look at the man again. You can tell what he is almost from his face. He is a vindictive man. His fault has indurated and settled deep in his character, and he has become a slave to it. His mind is now the chamber where are lodged permanently bad passions and malignant wishes. He has fixed hatreds, deep-rooted jealousies, animosities which poison and corrode his whole soul. He has fixed upon particular persons, from whom he fancies he has received

some signal injuries; and it is a sad fact that malignity grows by thus pasturing on individuals. All its force is elicited, and not only elicited but increased and multiplied, by concentration upon this man or that man from time to time. The passion likes to have some definite object upon which to lay hold; and when it has got one, it feeds upon it, and derives strength and life from it. If he cannot do these persons any harm, he wishes them harm; and the wish is a settled tenant of his mind. The habitual evil wish is a dreadful occupant of the heart; it conforms it more and more to the image of Satan, and it is indeed nothing less than Satan himself dwelling in the heart and making it his own.

But does this man think that he is altered at all from what he was? does he think that he is at all a worse man than he was when he had no settled malice in his heart, and did not habitually wish harm to anybody? He has no idea of any alteration in himself at all. He only thinks that while he himself is just the same he has come across worse people. He is conscious of enmities that he had not before, and that his mind is a scene of contest and strife, from which it was clear at one time; but he takes it for granted that the reason is, that now he has enemies and then he had not. The change, whatever there is, is thus accounted for by change of circumstances. Gross and miserable deception! That is not the reason. No; the change is not in his situation, it is in himself. He has changed because his own vice has grown. It has grown just as a tree grows, by an inward strength of its own. He has let it

grow, and therefore it has become what it is. A man is not made vindictive by having enemies, and by having causes of provocation. If it were so, as a matter of course everybody, as he advanced in age and entered more into the thick of life, its business and its interests, would be sure to grow more vindictive, because as the plot thickens and occasions multiply which oblige him to take a part, and as he is drawn more and more into the scene of action, he has of course more and more experience of opposition and opponents. But happily some tempers are, not only not roused but, chastened and sweetened by the experience of life. Divine grace can do this. It is not circumstances then that have produced this change. No. Enemies and opponents may arise on all sides, but man is not in the power of man. One man cannot make another man vindictive; only he himself can make himself this; and if he becomes of this temper, it is the inward growth of sin in his heart which has altered him.

I might give many more instances, but you can supply yourselves with them. It is thus then that people often go on getting worse and worse, letting sin grow; but thinking it all the time quite impossible that they should be worse. That idea which they started with they never give up—the idea that they never can alter for bad. All alteration they think must be for the better; if they have not improved, then they are the same they always were; but worse they cannot be. It is this deep ingrained assumption in men's minds which blinds them to the most startling facts about themselves. They do things which once they

never did, and which they would have been alarmed to find themselves doing. They are now absorbed in covetous passions and worldly aims; they have fierce desires to get this and that earthly prize; they sacrifice honesty, they do the meanest acts, they are guilty of constant pieces of deception in order to win them. There was a day when they would have shrunk from this; now they do it all as a matter of course; but still they have no idea that they are at all worse than they were. They are safe from that, they think, because it is an impossibility. Or it is other passions that have lodged themselves in them, and rule them. They have deep-seated hatreds; they are eaten through with envy and jealousy; they are unable to check the annoyance and disdain which they feel upon the least opposition being made to them; they are so inflated with egotism that they are able to take interest in nothing but what is directly or indirectly flattering to them, and ministering to their opinion of themselves. There was a time when all this was different; this permanent yoke of bad passions is a change. But still they do not look upon themselves as changed; that is the farthest from their minds. It is only circumstances that have altered. They see more of the world than they did, and meet with odious people; or they are themselves more important persons than they were, and others must bow to them. This is not the reason. It is not because they have met worse people that hatred has grown on them. It is not because they are more important persons, if they are so, than they were, that egotism and vanity have grown in them. Some men who get to be

very important men do not think more highly of themselves, but become more humble as they live longer. Their malice, their pride, are greater than they were, because the passions have grown. They have changed within. But this they do not and will not see. It is always circumstances that change, never themselves. Circumstances bear the responsibility of everything; circumstances make every man what he is, in their account of things. But what says the Scripture? Does Scripture attribute all this growth of sin to circumstances? No; it is the heart of man out of which his wickedness comes, if we believe the Bible. "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."* "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."† "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." Scripture everywhere says plainly that men do grow worse in this life, and that they grow worse out of themselves; and therefore it is that they reap the wages of sin, because it is their own sin. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."‡ Let us look to ourselves and to our own hearts, and watch and correct evil at its fount; for there is the fount of it. And especially at

* Matt. xii. 35. † Matt. xv. 19. ‡ Gal. vi. 7, 8.

the beginning of Lent* let us think of self-examination. There is no subject with which we can commence Lent better than that of man's sin, that it is within him, that it is his own doing, and that he will reap its wages unless he repents of it.

If it is really a shock to us to suppose that we can be worse beings than we were—if we shrink from the thought—now is the time to face this question seriously, and with earnest prayer. It is good for us to think of it as a real danger; if indeed we have not already undergone this awful change; to think of it while it is yet in our power, by God's grace, either to prevent a fall or to correct it if it has taken place; to think of it while there is yet time to undo the very worst knot, to loosen the bonds of sin, however strong, and to escape the wages of sin, which is death eternal.

* Preached the first Sunday in Lent.

*SERMON XII.*

# Our Lord the Sacrifice for Sin.

"*Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world.*"—JOHN i. 29.

IN this short sentence is summed up the whole doctrine which we celebrate this day.* Christ is the Lamb of God. He was the sacrifice to take away the sins of the world. Does sin require a sacrifice? The Bible says that it does, and the human heart responds of its own accord to this truth of which the Bible informs us. What is the first wish of the human heart when a man has committed a sin, and feels that it is a sin, and when he suffers pain of conscience? Is it not that the deed which torments him should in some way be undone and cancelled by some amends being made for it, something being done to compensate for it, and restore things as they were before? That is his first wish. He knows indeed that no power in heaven or earth can make him, when he has done the act, not to have done it. What has been done, has been done, and nothing can make it not to have been done. The past is irrevocable. What worlds indeed would many give for it not to be. How eagerly would

* Preached on Good Friday.

they accept the total annihilation of past acts! But that is impossible, and the next wish is, that something should be done to compensate for them. They would compensate for them by some acts of their own if they could, if it was in the power of man to make this amend, and to cancel his own sin. But here they are met by an obstacle which is altogether mysterious, but utterly insuperable; and which, though it is most mysterious, they feel to be most true—that nothing that we can do ourselves can cancel sin. We want an atonement. It is a need of the human heart. But where is it to come from? Who is to perform it? We cannot perform it for ourselves. An atonement is some act which makes such compensation and amends for past sin, as utterly to cancel it and make it *as though* it had never been. Mind, *as though* it had never been. No power in earth or heaven, as I have said, can make that not to have been done which has been done; the only imaginable and conceivable alteration is that it should be *as though* it had never been done, that all bad effects of it should be destroyed and obliterated, and that the sin should be nullified by compensation. This is the proper idea of an atonement; and the heathen of old times thought that they actually could themselves do what would atone for their sins. They accumulated sacrifice upon sacrifice, "burnt offerings, calves of a year old, thousands of rams and ten thousands of rivers of oil, their first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul." They thought that these at any rate could make their sin as though it had never been done. There have been those among the heathen who

even sacrificed their own lives to atone for their sins, as if at any rate that sacrifice must wipe off the reckoning against them. They were guilty; they died to efface that stain. Their atonement for sin was suicide—the death of the sinner by his own act. Even quite lately miserable crowds of Hindoos threw themselves under the chariot wheels of their great idol every year, and were of their own will and purpose crushed to death, in order to appease the anger of heaven against them. And shocking act as this was, still if man was determined to atone by some act of his own for his own sins, the act which would appear to him to have the greatest and most irresistible power to effect this, would not unnaturally appear to be this last and unequalled act of self-punishment. But all this was miserable error. The enlightened conscience of man, as soon as ever it reflects on itself at all, knows that the man cannot cancel his own sins, that there is nothing which he can do that can have that effect. He knows that to cancel a sin, even one sin, to make it as though it had never been done, is an astonishing and a marvellous work, and that we have nothing by which we can effect such a result; that it is as completely beyond and above us as anything else which is impossible. Can we raise our own bodies from their graves again when they have been once laid there? can we make the sun go back in its course? can we recall the tide at its ebb? No more can we do away with, and make as though it had never been done, one single sin that we have ever committed. It is a supernatural result to which no natural means are equal. We look within us and around us, and we

see nothing that can be done by which sin can be cancelled.

Some people think indeed that the mercy of God forgives sin without any sacrifice; but this is not the doctrine of the Bible, nor is it the doctrine of the human heart. Mankind have in all ages felt that some compensation and amends for sin was necessary. This has been a deep idea and conviction of man, and he has looked within him and around him for something that would constitute this amends. He erred indeed in thinking that any offerings of his own, and any punishment he could inflict on himself, could answer this purpose; but the instinct by which he saw the need of such amends was a true one. It was a true need which he felt; he only aimed at supplying it falsely, and thus laboured to no purpose. God is merciful indeed; but it does not follow that His mercy operates without anything intermediate, without anything done to meet it, without anything of the nature of amends and satisfaction on the side of sin. The Divine pardon of sin is not so easy or short a matter as some people would have it; there is something more in this business than they think of. If sin is anything real, if it is not a mere word, if it is not a mere shadow such as we frighten children with, if it is a serious, an unspeakably serious thing, how can we know that more is not required in the forgiveness of sin than these persons think? They make the pardon of it indeed very simple and intelligible, as they call it; but is not sin itself a mystery, a great mystery? and can they be sure that there is not something in the forgiveness of

sin mysterious also? Do we know all that sin is? We know indeed that we ought not to commit it, and we know that the conscience is hurt if we do; but we do not know all about it. It is too deep a thing to be completely comprehended by us. Its origin, its consequences, are all beyond our knowledge. How then can we know that something is not necessary in the process of forgiveness of sin besides mere and simple mercy? We cannot know it. This is a business with which we are unacquainted, and we must accept what the Bible tells us about it. The Bible tells us that something else takes place in this work of forgiveness beside an act of mercy, and that is an act of sacrifice and atonement. And the human heart responds to this truth because, as a matter of fact, man has in all ages set about looking for a compensation and amends for sin.

This sacrifice for sin, then, this atonement which mankind would have fain made for themselves but cannot; this satisfaction for sin by which sin is cancelled and made as though it had never been, which no natural means can effect, is accomplished in a supernatural and mysterious way, of which Scripture informs us. The wish for a satisfaction is the instinct of nature; but nowhere *in nature* do we find what we wish for—an atonement itself. That is supernatural, and a thing of revelation. The atonement which the human race has looked for in all ages, and not found, was performed in a completely mysterious, incomprehensible way upon the Cross on Calvary as upon this day: "Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away

the sin of the world." "Once in the end of the world hath Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."* "Every priest stood daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."† "Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come . . . not by the blood of goats or of calves, but by His own blood entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."‡

How the death of Christ upon the Cross is an atonement for the sins of the whole world is a complete mystery to us; but that it is so we know from revelation. All sin, upon repentance, is made as though it had never been by virtue of this sacrifice; it is cancelled, done away with: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."§ What an astonishing result! What a miracle of power and mercy! Here is accomplished all that man has yearned for, and so ineffectually striven after—the compensation, the atonement for sin. His wish is accomplished, though he cannot understand how. The atonement, when it has come, is a mystery; but he knows that it is made, that something has been done in heaven by which sin has been cancelled. He knows that there has been a great reconciliation, a great restoration. He does not see this, but he apprehends it by faith. There

* Heb. ix. 26. † Heb. x. 11.
‡ Heb. ix. 11. § Isaiah i. 18.

was nothing to distinguish our Lord in appearance from a mere man. His death was the death of a condemned criminal upon the cross. He rose indeed from the grave after it, and was seen by His disciples; but He died like an ordinary man. Yet was this death the atonement for the sins of the whole world: God in Christ reconciled "the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."* He suffered, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."†

Behold then the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, the very paschal Lamb Who was offered for us, Who by His death hath destroyed death, and by His rising to life again hath restored to us everlasting life. He came down from heaven, and from the blessedness which He had enjoyed from all eternity in the bosom of the Father, to save mankind from eternal death; to rescue him from sin, and the wages of sin, by offering Himself as a sacrifice for him. To die for another is the highest act of love that one man can do for another: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die," says the Apostle: "yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."‡ This was the crowning act of that life of which the whole was a sacrifice. Nor was our Lord without the natural shrinking from this final act of offering up His life which belonged to Him as man. He even prayed that, "if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup

* 2 Cor. v. 19. † 1 Peter iii. 18. ‡ Romans v. 7.

from Me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt:"* so bent is Scripture on making us know that our Lord had all that natural fear of death which belongs to man; and that, therefore, when He encountered death for the salvation of the human race, He made all the sacrifice which one who encounters death voluntarily makes. Nor should we be otherwise than on our guard against unconsciously—because our Lord rose again so soon after His death—not attaching to His death all the character of a true death and departure from this earthly life. He died, and by His death overcame death. It was His victory when those who passed by said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him." Had He come down from the Cross, that would have been the triumph of the devil; but He stayed on the Cross, and died there, and that was His victory over hell.

Behold, then, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. This is His title as the great Victim, the Sacrifice for sin, Who offered Himself up upon the altar of the Cross. It is the title on the strength of which He rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and now sits in glory on the right hand of God. Because He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; therefore God highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue

* Mark xiv. 36.

should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* In heaven itself He has the title. He retains it upon His eternal throne. Though more than conqueror, He still bears the mark of the victim. He is indeed Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last—the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth; but He is still the Lamb that was slain. "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain. . . . And the four beasts and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb. . . . And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. . . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."† All power indeed is given to our Lord in heaven and on earth; but He who hath it is still the Lamb that was slain. He has the name of the Sacrifice and the Victim even while He reigns supreme over all. "His eyes," when St. John saw Him in the Apocalyptic vision, "were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. And the armies which were in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of His mouth went a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He trod the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He had

* Phil. ii. 8. † Rev. v. 6–12.

on His vesture and upon His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords."* But amidst all the symbols of His kingly glory and His Godhead, He still bore the memorial of the Sacrifice and the Victim: "He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and His name was called the Word of God." The Word that was made flesh, and dwelt among us; Who came unto His own, and His own received Him not, is the Lord of all, reigning in majesty inconceivable; but He is still the *Lamb*. "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps. . . . These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb."† Thus supreme in heaven, and Head over all things, worshipped by the saints, and treading the devil under His feet, He is still the Lamb that was slain, the Victim that was offered up by Himself upon the Cross. The glory of His Cross still remains amid all the glories of His Resurrection and Ascension;—His sitting at the right of power, and His return to judge the world. The saints see before them their Redeemer; the wicked see their Judge whom they persecuted, even to death, upon earth; but both see the Lamb. "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him." And when the Day of Judgment is passed, and eternity has begun, amid the

* Rev. xix. † Rev. xiv.

glory and happiness which fills the heavenly Jerusalem, we still behold the Lamb of God. "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." "And He shewed me a pure river of water, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. . . . And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him." Our Lord is thus for ever "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." He retains the glory of the Cross throughout eternity, the title of the Victim. The glorified saints for ever worship the Lamb that was slain, remembering His death, and giving Him glory for all the happiness which they have derived from it, connecting His throne with the Cross, His majesty with His humiliation, and His Godhead with His having taken our flesh and become man for our sakes.

*SERMON XIII.*

# The Parable of the Sower.

"*A sower went out to sow his seed.*"—LUKE viii. 5.

THE parable of the sower is both a solemn lesson and warning, and also a description of what is actually taking place in the world. It tells how the human heart actually treats the seed which is put into it—the word of God,—the impulse which it receives from God to lead a good and holy life. All these receptions and all these rejections of the word are actually going on amongst us. There are calls perpetually going on; there are either sudden rejections or gradual forgettings of those calls perpetually going on also. Perhaps it is not enough generally understood, that everybody does receive a call to lead a holy life;—a distinct call. I say everybody; for though it is just possible that even in a Christian population some may be so much out of the way of all religious influences that they may not have received any impulse and awakening of this kind, as a general rule, and when there are the ordinary religious influences at work, everybody does, at some time or other, experience such a decided feeling and sense of the momentous importance of religion, as

does amount to a call. Such calls may differ in degree, and strength, and strikingness of the impression, but they are all calls; because a truth is distinctly embraced by the mind of the person at the time: he sees that something is true which he had not realized to be true before, and had only held in word. I say that it is hardly possible, considering what the human heart is, and what there is in it, but that with religious mementos all around, and objects and language calculated to produce religious impressions, everybody, every ordinary member of the Christian Church, must receive, at some time or other, such a sense and peculiar conviction into his mind as amounts to a call. Because the human heart is not naturally a dead thing, it is a living thing, susceptible, alive to teaching, to warning, to hope. In the midst, then, of constant objects and events, as well as express religious teaching, it must at some time be caught, as it were, into the mesh, and be fastened upon by religious truth. And such an occasion is a call. The person can never afterwards say that he did not know, or was not made fully aware of Christian truth; or that it was always brought before him in such a way that he could not recognize it. He has been made to see it and to recognize it.

This is a very awful consideration; and this it is with which the parable deals. The parable tells us how people treat these calls. And first it tells us that there is a certain class in whose case "the devil cometh and taketh away the word out of their hearts." It is evident that this class is spoken of as a different class from those who forget the call in consequence of a light and

careless nature, as well as from those who busy themselves in the cares and business of the world. The devil indeed tempts persons to all kinds of sin, both to carelessness, and to covetousness and worldliness; but nevertheless there is a particular sort of wickedness, which hardly ranks with the gradual decay which levity or worldliness brings about, which is attributed in Scripture to the more direct action of Satan upon the human heart. It is that bold, proud, sometimes even sudden and impulsive act of sin, by which in a moment people cast out of their hearts something which incommodes and annoys them, and threatens to interfere with the favourite pleasure or object which they have placed before them;—their plan of happiness in life. The Spirit of God acquaints them with some powerful truth about religion, its necessity, its glorious aim; for the human heart cannot help itself here, it must realize this as a piece of knowledge, if it is so impressed. But this truth so perceived becomes an obstacle to their treasured aim and prospect. What do they do then? They—by perhaps one bold, determined act—cast it out of their minds. They say to themselves, "I will not be interfered with; I have made my plan, and I shall pursue it." Persons who have formed the intention of getting on in life, attaining to wealth and station, are perhaps especially liable to encounter this kind of obstacle, and thus to deal with it. This class is not necessarily without religious impressions and perceptions, but they think that they shall be able to make both exactly agree—these religious convictions, and success in life. But all at once they come upon a diffi-

culty; something stops the way, not from without, but from within; something has to be done which they had rather not do; it goes against their conscience. Shall their plan of life then be spoilt for this one impediment? No; by a summary act they cast out the scruple, and do what is wanted. This is the kind of act that Scripture especially assigns to diabolical influence. "The devil cometh and taketh away the word out of their hearts;" he tempts them to cast out the religious impulse which would have kept them straight with God, but not with man. I do not say that a man may not recover spiritually after having inflicted such a blow upon himself, but it is a dreadful act, which provokes the righteous justice of God, and that worst of punishments, a hardened heart.

When a man then, not as the effect of mere levity, or owing to the gradual absorption in the cares of the world, expels, by a haughty resolution, a spiritual impulse because it stands in his way and impedes his own choice, that is the devil coming and taking the word out of his heart. It may be some favourite pleasure, it may be the pursuit of riches, it may be the pursuit of honour, which the impediment threatens. It matters not what it is, so long as it is the rebellious heart ejecting the conviction, or the scruple, which has come from God to stem some besetting sin. Thus Judas overrode with high hand his reluctance to betray our Lord; and it is said that the devil entered into him. Ananias and Sapphira cast out of their minds the Christian obligation to sincerity—stopped their ears to the voice within which said, as from the throne of God itself, "Do not

lie; tell the truth!" and they lied both to God and man. And Peter asked them, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart?" Satan is himself a rebel, and he tempts to great acts of rebellion.

And how strikingly in connection with these temptations of Satan to expel truth and defy spiritual light does the succeeding clause in the parable come: "Lest they should believe, and be saved." Doubtless it is a great trial men are undergoing. If they will obey God's word speaking in them at the cost of worldly aims, they gain at once a great vantage-ground. Satan knows this, and urges them to disobey. If they do but one of these turning acts, he has gained a great victory, and gone far to achieve the loss of a soul.

I have described men not of light, flighty, and unsteady minds, but, on the contrary, persons often of great firmness and steadiness of action, who, if they had applied these qualities to the proper objects, would have turned out remarkable and influential religious men; but who—being possessed by a worldly spirit—by an act of rebellion, in order not to be stopped in their plans, have summarily expelled God's truth or word from their hearts. But now I come to the second class mentioned in the parable, those who from levity and carelessness of mind give up, and allow to escape from them, the word which they at first received with gladness. These are described as not having any root in themselves. They could receive the word, because that merely implies the capacity of being *acted upon* by solemn and powerful representations of the truth; which they might be, just as they might be impressed by some

striking scene or striking incident. But when they had received the word, they had no energy of their own to take hold of it and extract its powers; and accordingly it is said that they soon fell away. How seldom will people really understand how totally different a thing it is to begin a thing, and to go on with it! Beforehand they suppose that to go on with a thing is exactly the same as beginning, only that it is the beginning repeated, become something done often and regularly instead of once; whereas there is all the difference in the nature of the two things. The commencement is in its own nature something fresh; but to go on with a task—an undertaking which has been begun for the love of God or man, or the salvation of one's own soul—is to do things over and over again when they have ceased to be fresh, when the first impression is gone, and we are dependant only on the sense of duty to give us strength to do what we have to do. And in this dryness of the spirit doubts and misgivings arise; obstacles take great effect upon us. The beginning is indeed in some cases the hardest part of the matter, as the proverb says; but in the case before us, when we start upon a work in consequence of some powerful impression being made upon us, the beginning is not the hardest part, it is the easiest; the beginning is done for us, the continuance we must do ourselves. It is all the difference between another's action and our own; and hence the constant memento in Scripture to Christians to persevere to the end. Perseverance to the end is the Christian triumph. It is only when we have gone on for some time in a course that we know what we are

made of; that we have made acquaintance with ourselves sufficiently to be a ground of confidence. This is one of those great notes which sound through Scripture, the necessity of continuance, of not stopping before the end: "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life."* "Watch therefore: for ye know not at what hour your Lord doth come." "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."† Love is tried by continuance, by going on with what we have begun. It does not require *heart* to be taken with an idea and a truth at first. Those light-minded persons mentioned in the parable were captivated with the first view of religion. But they had no depth of affection for what was right as God's law; they adopted it as a fancy, and threw it away again when they had tried it. Is not this the type of a very large class? How true is this gospel description to the actual facts which we see around us! What change, what inconstancy do we see in the human heart! Upon how many do we count for continuing their profession under different circumstances? Is there not a regular expectation formed in us, when we estimate the manifestations which men make, that they will not last; that they have their time, like the seasons or periods of weather, and that they will end as naturally as they have begun? Can there be a greater contrast to the abiding faithfulness of the gospel pattern?

The next class mentioned in the parable are those who are choked with the cares, and riches, and pleasures

* Rom. ii. 7. † Matt. xxiv. 13.

of this life. This is a distinct class from both which have been spoken of before. Those who have neither unscrupulous boldness, nor, again, have the temper of levity and unthinkingness, are guilty of worldliness; of allowing themselves to become absorbed in the business, and plans, and pursuits of this present life. They are not light-minded men altogether; they are serious as regards this world, calculating, exercising forecast, attentive, persevering; but it is solely in relation to this world that they maintain this gravity and seriousness. They do not give a place in their thoughts to another world. And here again the parable fixes upon one common mistake of men in respect to religion, which is the root of one large part of man's practice. Our Lord says, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon;" and yet it would almost appear as if one-half of mankind started on their career in life for the purpose of proving that this saying of our Lord's was not true; that they would serve God and mammon; that men could be wholly devoted to and occupied by the pursuit of what the world has to give, its wealth and honour, and yet show that they are religious men all the time; thus combining two things which our Lord says cannot be combined. Each one thinks that in his own particular case there will be a complete agreement in these two great aims and undertakings, the earthly and the spiritual; that others may have missed this union, but that they will fix upon it. They enter upon their course in life with a swing. Feeling no hesitation about themselves, they plunge into the thick of the struggle for the world's possessions, they are carried away with

the ardour of the pursuit, and they do not imagine at all that they are injuring or suppressing the religious principle in them. They are so convinced that that can and will maintain itself, and that no worldly activity will in the least affect it, that they never think of looking after it, to see how it is faring. And so the stream carries them along, being interested in the objects of the world, content with supposition and doing nothing about religion; until that which has thriven by practice has completely driven out the principle which has had no exercise, and the result is a simple man of the world.

Such are the different ways of treating the seed or word of God, which end in its suppression and decay in man's heart. And opposed to these is the treatment given to it by the honest and good heart. The honest and good heart does not sin against light; does not change and abandon what it has undertaken; and is not ensnared by the deceitfulness of riches, and captivated by the pomp and show of this world. It is faithful to God. It knows the excellence of religion, and what good things God has in store for them that love Him; and it is able to count the cost, and to make the sacrifice which is necessary for the great end in view. Have we, my brethren, that honest and good heart? We cannot know this for certain until we have continued and persevered to the end. Those who have begun well may boldly cast away the Spirit, or they may fall away from grace because they have no root, or they may be swallowed up by the cares and aims of worldly life. We know not what we are till we have been tried to

that extent which God thinks fit. But so far as we have striven, we may feel a comfortable sense that we do possess that heart; and certainly if we have not striven, we cannot give ourselves any such hope. Let us strive to enter in at the straight gate, and to be found among the faithful.

*SERMON XIV.*

# The Religious Enjoyment of Nature.

"*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*"—MATTHEW vi. 28, 29.

OUR Lord is represented in so awful a character in the gospels, all the designs and aims which occupy Him are so spiritual, and belong so completely to another world, that we are at first almost surprised at a passage like this, in which we see Him affected with admiration for the beauty of nature, and the flowers of the field; and we are almost inclined to ask ourselves how it was that One Who had so sublime and spiritual a mission, Who preached the kingdom of God and eternal life to mankind, Who was Himself the Son of God, and Who said of Himself even while on earth that He was in heaven, how He could spare a thought for such familiar natural objects? Yet it is evident that He did; and that admiration of His Father's visible creation, that which in a mere man we should express by the ordinary phrase, "love of nature," was habitual in Him as man; because we are not to suppose that the gospels tell us every fact that occurred about

our Lord, and that therefore when they mention one particular occasion on which He showed this admiration of the work of creation this was the only time He ever felt or evinced this admiration. This would be indeed a very gratuitous and unworthy inference; and besides we are told by St. John, at the end of his gospel, that so far from everything which our Lord did being related in it, on the contrary, only a very small portion was recorded—a mere sample, as it were: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." The things told us of our Lord in the gospels are thus only specimens of a great number of things of the same kind which were done and said by Him, but which are omitted by the sacred historians. When therefore we read any remarkable saying of our Lord upon the subject of God, or of man, or of the human soul, or, as is the case in the text, of the objects of nature, we may be sure that such sayings were the expressions of an habitual feeling in Him as man, and that the admiration of what was glorious in creation was a constant and settled affection of His mind, in company with the other characteristics of His life and disposition.

We know that at the creation of the world "God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." Some of the works then of the visible creation were good because they were useful and necessary, and because the life of man could not be supported without them; others were good because they were full of beauty,

and, as objects for the eye, imparted the greatest pleasure and delight to beings who were endowed with reason; and who were gifted with the perceptions whereby they could discern this beauty. It is of these latter objects of nature that our Lord speaks on the occasion mentioned in the text. We ought then to be able to rejoice in those parts of the creation which were designed especially to give us delight. When we rejoice in them properly we do homage to Him Who is the author of them. Who is there but must be conscious, when he admires greatly one or other of those glorious sights of nature by which we are surrounded, that he is simply doing that which he was intended to do, that he is fulfilling the divine wish. Why should God place such spectacles before him if He did not design them to be admired? It would be an ungracious act towards a human artist, who had composed a beautiful work for the eye, if, when he had put it before our eyes, we passed it over, and said it gave us no pleasure to look at it. And it is the same with respect to the great Divine Artificer and Maker of heaven and earth. He must be pleased with our admiration of His own sublime work. It is an accommodation to our understandings indeed to speak of God, as Scripture does, as delighting in the worship of His creatures; but if God does delight in being honoured by men, in having a seat in the human heart, then He must be pleased with this token also of human honour; viz., our appreciation of those visible objects which have issued from His creating handiwork. This admiration then of God's natural creation is not an earthly, but an exalted

and a pure delight. It is a joy fit for spiritual beings who are admitted to the knowledge of God, and the adoration of His goodness and glory. Is not any one conscious of this when he looks up, *e.g.*, in a fine starry night, to the vault of heaven, and sees all those marvellous worlds suspended over his head, or when he views the great sea spread out before him, or when he sees the clouds majestically piled in the sky, or when, to take the more humble and familiar instance of the glory of nature mentioned in the text, he admires the flowers of the field? All this joy is so interwoven with our nature as understanding and spiritual beings, that we must become utterly corrupt before we can altogether lose it, or cast it aside. And our Lord has put His stamp upon it in the admission of this pleasure and delight in the objects of nature, into the awful sanctuary of His own mind; and in the expression which He has given to this pleasure. It was not beneath Him to be affected with delight in beholding the lilies of the field, and to say that they were more gloriously arrayed than ever Solomon was, because this appreciation and perception was part of His true manhood, whereby He enjoyed in perfection all the perceptions and faculties with which God had endowed man.

But though the true perception of the beauty of God's handiwork, and the right joy in it, are of the nature of spiritual delights, as is shown by our Lord having enjoyed them, there is a kind of pleasure in the scenes of nature which, though not exactly culpable, is a volatile, thoughtless, and inferior kind of pleasure; one which does not edify or produce any fruits;

does not inspire any good thoughts into the mind; does not raise it upwards. Our Saviour's discourse on this occasion will, if we sincerely attend to it, be very profitable to us in enabling us to distinguish between these two kinds of enjoyment of visible nature, and discern in what consists the great and vital characteristic of the true perception of and delight in the visible creation, as compared with the inferior pleasure I have mentioned.

The lower kind of pleasure then, which thoughtless and unreflecting people sometimes derive from the beauties of visible nature, is not accompanied by any thought about the human soul itself, which is the perceiver of it; it does not bring up any solemn thought about themselves, as thus admitted to this insight into Divine order and beauty. People may innocently enjoy even the animal spirits which the fresh air, fine weather, the opening year, and the general view of earth and sky impart; but in the way in which these are often enjoyed such pleasure is not spiritual, or edifying, or elevating, because it does not carry them onward to think about their own souls, the souls which God has thus framed to correspond to His own work, to be in harmony with His creation, and to be equal to the sight of the glory of it. To be able to admire the works of God is no slight thing; it is a great privilege. The animals do not possess it; they have not the slightest idea of the kind of world they are in; but man does possess it. The proper delight then in visible nature sends men to the thought of themselves and their own souls. It is a delight accom-

panied with serious ideas and solemn impressions; it makes a man say to himself, "God has given me what He has given to no other creature—a rational soul, whereby it is that I do see His visible creation. How momentous a gift is this understanding soul! with how deep a nature has God endowed me! How ought this thought to impress me, to sober me, to discipline and regulate me: 'Lord, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the Son of man, that Thou visitest Him?' The grass withereth and the flower fadeth, the goodness and beauty of this visible creation will one day come to nought, but that which perceives it all—the soul—will live for ever." Such a deep and serious pleasure in the works of nature raises solemn thoughts and high thoughts; it exercises the best gifts of reason. But that kind of pleasure in nature which is merely a stirring of the animal spirits, does not go in this direction at all, does not remind a man in any way of himself and his own soul. It spends itself in mere good spirits and pleasant sensations, which produce nothing. A man may know that he is enjoying himself under the influence of outward nature; but the true recognition of the beauty of God's works is a much deeper kind of perception than this, and its characteristic is that which I have dwelt on; viz., that it makes a man think of his own soul. Is not this the immediate direction of David's thoughts as soon as he has contemplated the glories of nature? From nature he turns straight to man; and he has no sooner said, "I will consider Thy heavens, the works of Thy fingers, the moon and

the stars," then he adds, "What is *man*, that Thou art mindful of him?" He has no sooner said, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," than he thinks of his soul, and of the law of God which converteth the soul.

And this is the very direction taken in our Lord's observations upon nature as given in the text. He immediately goes from external nature to the human soul; He reminds us how precious a thing the human soul is, how high its rank is in God's sight, how vast its interests are, how glorious its prospects! He says that however we may admire the objects of outward nature, and admire them with feeling and truth, the human soul is infinitely more important; that it has a being in comparison with which all the fading scenes and objects of the external world are as nothing. "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more shall He not clothe you, O ye of little faith?" That is the lesson in which His discourse upon nature ends—the great truth of the worth and value of the human soul; its great superiority above all other things in this world; the supremacy it holds in the created universe. The lesson is that God cares for all the works of His hand, but for none in the same sense in which He cares for man. They perish, but the human soul survives; they decay, and are renewed year by year. The verdure which clothes the earth, the plants which grow upon it, even those members of the vegetable world which last longest, all in time come to an utter end, and they are succeeded

by other herbage and plants and trees. But the human soul is immortal; it has a spiritual nature whereby, being once existing, it exists for ever—at present in this world, afterwards in other worlds, of which we know nothing in detail or description, but the existence of which is revealed to us in Scripture. God cares for the brute creation, for birds and beasts, in that He provides food for them; but He does not care for them in the same sense in which He cares for us. "Are not five sparrows," says our Lord, "sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? . . . Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." The lesson our Lord teaches on all occasions when He makes observations upon the visible creation, whether the fowls of the air or the lilies of the field, is the superiority of man and the human soul, that everything is of little worth in comparison with it. It alone bears the indelible stamp and image of God upon it; and we are never to forget what we are, but to value our own immortal souls above every thing this world can give us. This is our Lord's perpetual teaching—the worth of the soul: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" "Fear not them which kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him Which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Let that be the truth ever impressed upon us and fixed in our hearts by all this spectacle of outward nature which surrounds us; let us admire the visible creation, but let our admiration ever go in that direction to which our Lord

points. Let it not be an idle, vain, thoughtless, and frivolous admiration; let it not merely raise our animal spirits for the moment, but let it fix upon us the truth which our Lord extracted from it; let us think of the soul, its superiority to everything else in the world, its spirituality, its eternity. We shall then be true disciples of Christ, and followers of His teaching.

*SERMON XV.*

# The Threefold Office of the Holy Spirit.

"*And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*"—JOHN xvi. 8–11.

IT is evident that these three effects of the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world are connected together, and that they are one whole. The Holy Spirit when He comes will convince the world of sin. That is the first and most obvious effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. He enlightens men's minds, quickens their perceptions with respect to themselves, and brings their misdeeds, their selfishness, their deceit, malice, and covetousness, out of their hiding-places; so that whereas without the Holy Spirit to enlighten them they do not know what manner of men they are, do not know that they have these faults; by the light of the Holy Spirit they are discovered to themselves, and know that they are thus wicked. Again, the Holy Spirit will convince the world of righteousness, and this is connected with His convincing the world of sin. For by what evidence does the Holy

Spirit show men that they are thus sinful and vile? By the evidence of the righteousness of Christ. Christ showed mankind by His own example what righteousness was. But when men know what righteousness is, then they know what sin is; and they feel that they themselves are sinful, because they see how far they fall short of true righteousness. This is the natural effect, in a degree, of the righteousness of any good man; it makes other men see their own extreme defects and shortcomings. Persons go on indulging in a number of faults which they hardly know to be faults till they are brought into contact with some one who is without them. Then they remark the absence of them in him; they see something in him different from themselves. This sets them on self-examination, and then they wish to correct themselves. Thus the righteousness of any good man in its degree convinces the world of sin; *i.e.* not all the world; for the world in general hardens its heart against the example of holiness and goodness. It hardens its heart against it on account of this very effect, that it does convince of sin. The generality do not want to be convinced of sin, and therefore dislike high example when it comes before them, and disown and reject it; often indeed denying that it is good example, and charging it with weakness of mind, eccentricity, and fanaticism.

But though on this account good example does not convince the mass of the world of sin, it convinces those who are able to be convinced. And if any good example produces in its degree this effect, how much more must the perfect example of Christ produce it! How must

that great manifestation of goodness awaken the world! and what a vast spiritual light it must create in the world, revealing to men their own guilt and misery. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

In this way these two effects of the coming of the Holy Spirit are plainly connected together—convincing the world of sin, and convincing it of righteousness. But how is the Holy Spirit's convincing the world of righteousness connected with Christ's going up to the Father—"of righteousness, because I go to the Father and ye see me no more"? In this way. The glorious and perfect life of Christ could not be completed and made into a full and absolute pattern but by death; and therefore it was after our Lord's death and ascension that this ordained manifestation of goodness was finished and consummated in such wise as to become the light of the world; raising a new standard of holiness, and thus convincing the world of sin. When Christ had gone to the Father, that is, after the completion and consummation of the Sublime Exemplar, then the Holy Spirit came into the world in order to draw men's minds to it; to awaken men out of their sleep to see what a transcendant form of goodness had appeared among them, to set this example on high, as a city on a hill, for all mankind to have before them, and either be converted or hardened by it; either convinced of sin, or fixed in impenitence. But it was first necessary that Christ should go to the Father, that this life of goodness

should be consummated; that He should become obedient unto death. Then the example was complete, and His glory was perfected. "God highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

And now we come to the third member of the text, the third effect of the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world—"He shall convince the world of judgment." It is evident that if by the enlightening operation of the Holy Spirit sin is known, and righteousness is known, the ground is then laid for judgment, because judgment is only the just, and proper, and true estimate of righteous men and wicked men. The Holy Spirit, therefore, in the next place, and as the third result which follows from the two former, convinces the world of judgment; that is to say, He brings out in prominent and living characters the whole idea of judgment; of there being a division in the world; of there being two kinds of people in the world, good and bad, righteous and wicked. Scripture fixes this awful and terrible truth upon our attention almost in every page; it never lets us forget it, but by every kind of saying, symbol, and metaphor, impresses upon us the great division of mankind into good and bad. The sheep and the goats, the tares and the wheat, the chaff and the wheat, those who are on the right hand and those who are on the left, those who go on the broad way and those who go

* Phil. ii. 11.

on the narrow, those who enter in at the strait gate and those who enter in at the wide gate, represent respectively these two portions of the world between whom this deep chasm lies, and who are separated by that boundary, on the one side of which is light, and the other darkness, on the one side God's favour, on the other His wrath. There stands up everywhere in Scripture the Pillar of Fire and of Cloud, and it comes between the camp of Israel and the camp of the Egyptians, and gives light by night to the one, but cloud and darkness to the other. The Gospel is especially penetrated by this idea of judgment; it declares the enmity of the world to God, and distinguishes between the world and those who are not of the world; it separates the followers of Christ from the world; it announces that Christ will manifest Himself to His disciples and not unto the world. It says, "Woe unto the world because of offences;" it says that "we cannot serve two masters;" that we cannot have the treasure of our heart in earth and in heaven at the same time. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself described as the Judge Who does thus separate between the righteous and the wicked, Who places the sheep on the right hand, and the goats on the left; "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."* At His second coming He will judge the world finally, and divide for ever the tares from the wheat; but even His first coming was attended by premonitory signs of judgment. His very presence in the world was a test

* Matt. iii. 12.

which tried who had faith and who had not; and it acted as a touchstone of the sincerity and truth of men's hearts, who had real religion and who had not. He judged the Pharisees; "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" On the other hand there were those whose faithfulness, simplicity, and devotion, His presence revealed, and concerning whom He thanks His Father in heaven: "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight." The Gospel was glad tidings of great joy, but it also sounded from the first a great division of mankind into two sides. The gospel preached a judgment to come, an eternal separation of the good from the bad, and it was attended by presages of that final judgment; it separated the Church from the world, believers from unbelievers.

And thus it was that the prince of this world was judged. Our Lord connects the Holy Spirit convincing the world of judgment, with this reason—"because the prince of this world is judged;" and the connection of the two is explained in this way: that so soon as the idea of a judgment was established in the world, so soon as the division of mankind into the righteous and the wicked was seen, and a congregation and body of holy men was formed in the world in distinction to the world itself, that moment the prince of this world was judged. He was deprived of his undivided power over the world; his dominions were

spoiled. So long as the world was blind to the great distinction of the righteous and wicked, or only dimly saw it, and had no eternal judgment before its eyes, so long the prince of this world triumphed; but when this distinction was fully seen, and the Church was formed in opposition to the world, then he was weakened as a power in this world. He had no longer the whole of it; his pride was brought down; he was judged.

It was then this truth of a judgment to come—a judgment now going on in one sense, a present division of men into good on the one side, and evil on the other—a final judgment of rewards and punishments, of which the Holy Spirit, it is said in the text, was to convince the world. "When He is come He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." That is to say, He will keep alive in men's hearts the sense of a judgment one day to take place, and of a great division now existing in the world. He will fasten upon them the vital truth of there being a real separation of the good from the bad going to take place openly in another world, and existing spiritually now; and He will teach them to discern between the good and the evil even here, not so absolutely indeed as to justify men in pronouncing judgments upon one another, but still enough for the purposes of caution and warning. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things." The Holy Spirit is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and He enables those whom He endows with His assistance and presence to distinguish in some practical measure, sufficient

for their own needs, the good from the evil in this world, and the really good from pretenders and hypocrites. He gives wisdom to the simple, and knowledge to the unlearned. "I know My sheep," says our Saviour, "and am known of Mine." And again, "The sheep follow Him: for they know His voice; but a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers."* And the same gift of wisdom, which enables them to follow the true Shepherd, directs them to discern the true followers of the Shepherd with sufficient accuracy to save themselves from the snares of the wicked; that is to say, the Holy Spirit convinces them of judgment. He makes them feel thoroughly and habitually that the world is divided into good and evil; and being convinced of this, they are on their guard against evil men. They know they are all around them, and this thought makes them watchful.

In our Lord's thus announcing that it would be the special function of the Holy Spirit when He comes to keep alive the idea of judgment, the sense of a division of mankind into good and evil, we plainly see both how important and how difficult is this work. It would not have been appropriated to the Holy Ghost thus conspicuously had it not needed His all-powerful aid; and it needed His strong aid because the work was so arduous a one. We see indeed that to keep up in mankind a real living sense of a judgment, to make them feel that the world is really divided into good and evil, is one of the most difficult lessons which

* John x. 5.

devolves upon religion. People own the truth in words, and reject it in their hearts. Characters are so mixed in this world, the good have such infirmities, and the bad have such disguises, and are so able to do apparently good things in matters in which they are not the least tried, that the tendency of a great many is to confuse good and bad together here; to take all mankind in a mass as only differing in special points and degrees from each other, and not to recognize the broad distinction into good and evil; that great division which is the ground of the judgment mentioned in the text. So it is that people especially want to be convinced of judgment, and that when it is said that the Holy Spirit is to reprove the world of judgment, we know that it is a very great work He has promised to perform in the world. He keeps alive in the hearts of men the expectation of that great final issue to which everything that we see around us is so opposed. Men are apt to say, "'Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world.' Things always have gone in this mixed way, and they always will." Thus they virtually disbelieve in a judgment; but the Holy Spirit reproves the world of judgment. He does not allow this great truth to become obsolete, to be passed over, to be put aside, to be buried and overwhelmed in the bustle and turmoil of life, or in the moral confusion and ambiguity of men's characters here. He does not allow it to be undermined by philosophical fashions of thought which rise up. He keeps it a fresh and living conviction in the mind of the Church and body of the

faithful. Let us pray to the Holy Spirit that He will keep alive in our hearts this important belief; that He will not suffer us to be deadened by the business of the world, or our faith weakened by the mixture and confusion around us; by the tares growing together with the wheat, by the good and bad appearing alike to enjoy God's temporal blessings; nay, the good often missing these blessings, on account of their goodness, in resisting the tempting offers of the world; that He will not allow our belief in God's final justice to be suppressed by our daily intercourse with men; but that He will direct our look forward to the end, and cherish our anticipation of that day when the Lord will come to judgment, and will for ever separate the righteous from the wicked.

*SERMON XVI.*

# Wisdom and Folly Tested by Experience.

"*And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.*"
—ECCLESIASTES i. 17.

THERE is something very remarkable in the statement which the writer of the book Ecclesiastes here makes about himself; for it is not at first very intelligible how any one could seriously set about to make trial of the pursuits of wisdom and of folly at the same time, as if it were a matter of doubt which were the better of the two, and the point were only to be decided by experience. Certainly, if anything may be taken for granted at starting, it might be taken for granted that wisdom was superior to folly, without any long course of enquiry, or any experiments being made on the subject, and more especially if a person is of a grave and understanding temper, as the writer of this book evidently is. For a grave and discerning person to be seriously setting about a course of folly and madness in order that he might discover by experience what the effects of such a course are, and make his observations upon them, is something in the highest degree superfluous. His wisdom, if he is a wise man,

could surely tell him beforehand that the effects of such a course would not be advantageous. However, this is what the wise man who wrote the book Ecclesiastes here tells us he did, "I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly;" that is, he tried them both, in order to see what the comparative effects of the two courses were. He sets to work as if making a course of experiments in natural science, to discover some truth which could only be decided in that way. "Will this course of life or that produce the best results? I will try both, and then I shall know by experience which does, and shall not be in any further doubt on the question." The whole of the book Ecclesiastes shows more or less of this spirit. It is the work of an inquisitive mind, bent on knowing everything and trying everything which it was possible to know and try—a mind distrustful of everything short of actual experience, and distrustful of every other experience except its own; viewing the whole of life as a field of curious information, about which a wise man was accurately to satisfy himself at every step. "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards. . . . I gathered me also silver and gold. . . . I gat me

men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men. . . . And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them. . . . Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought. . . And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly. . . . Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness." * That is to say, he tells us that he has tried every sort of life; mirth and amusement, not because he cared about mirth and amusement particularly, but because he wanted to see, as a matter of curiosity and experience, what they would do for him; then that he tried greatness and pomp for the same reason; then that he tried what amassing money would do for him. So the three great vices of sensuality, pride, and covetousness are here seriously tried, and regular courses of each successively entered into by a man of great penetration and gravity, not because he really wants to indulge himself, but because he wants to know as a matter of experiment what these vices will produce, and what state of mind they will leave him in.

Now the first question to ask, after the description of such a character of mind as this, is, Whether Scripture approves of it? And the answer to this is, Most surely not. The writer of the book Ecclesiastes was undoubtedly a holy man, for he was undoubtedly an inspired person when he wrote this book; but he does not record all these circumstances of his past life as any part of this holiness or inspiration. He refers to them evidently as so much past history of himself,

* Eccles. ii.

which he gives for the sake of the result which it ended in, and of which he informs us for our advantage; viz., that everything except goodness is vanity and misery. There is just the very contrary of any recommendatory tone in the description of this course of life, and the state of mind he had gone through. There is everything to dissuade others from it. He seems to say that he gave himself a great deal of trouble to very little purpose; only after all arriving at results which he might have taken for granted beforehand. The tone is a sorrowful and discouraging one, as regards any advantage to be derived from such experience. He tells it, and describes it, evidently in order that it may not, not in order that it may, be imitated.

This point settled, we may, I think, draw a practical lesson from the character which is here put before us. There are two ways of arriving at the knowledge of the truth respecting the importance and benefit of holiness and goodness. I say that persons in general certainly want to have a perception of and an insight into the truth on this subject; and that there are two ways which we see them taking for gaining this knowledge. These two ways are—one the experience of what is good, the other the experience of what is bad.

One way, and it is certainly the best way, of gaining a true knowledge of the great advantage of a good life, is by the experience of what a good life itself is. There are, by the blessing of God, many persons in the world who do arrive at the deepest sense of the value of goodness in this way. They take it for granted, at starting—without any hankering after experience and

personal knowledge—in all simplicity of mind, that a good life certainly will end in making them happy, and that the contrary will end otherwise; and they take to leading a good life; and by leading a good life they get more and more to feel and know the advantage and happiness of it, and they have ultimately the most certain knowledge, by the actual experience of it in their own case, of the truth on this subject.

But there is another class of persons, unfortunately, who prefer obtaining the knowledge of this truth by the experience of what is directly contrary, by the experience, that is, of what is evil. There needs some care in describing this class of persons, though it is a very common one, otherwise I shall run the risk of appearing to make them more searchers after knowledge than they are; whereas the majority of them are simply intent upon present pleasure and self-indulgence, without any aim whatever at experience and knowledge in what they do. I do not mean to say, when I bring the character described in the first chapter of Ecclesiastes to bear upon the class of men of pleasure and men of the world, that they are animated with the same inquisitive pursuit after truth that that character exhibits. But still there is, in the case of many of this class, in the way they enter upon their worldly courses of life, a spirit which is a sort of imitation of that we see in Ecclesiastes, a desire, as they would call it, of gaining experience and knowledge of life. While the great majority are mere lovers of pleasure for pleasure's sake, mere frivolous and self-indulgent persons, a certain proportion may be said to have, in a

vague, obscure way, a notion that such a course of life will ultimately lead them into the possession of some great truths, and that they will have a more real and practical sense even of the value of morality and religion, after they have tried and felt in their own case what the effects of the reverse mode of life are. They despise what is natural and instructive, and are all for experience; and they dimly promise themselves that they shall one day have a much clearer apprehension even of moral and religious truth than those who have instinctively and blindly, as they would say, followed that truth from the first. How strong a hold the notion has over many minds, that the knowledge of evil will be an ultimate gain to them! The voice that once spake, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," speaks yet, and with fatal effect. And we see persons early entering upon a life of worldly pleasure and excitement, a great deal of course from simple carnal weakness and self-indulgence, but having also mingled with these motives a kind of idea that they are going to get dignity and strength of mind by this line of life; that they will be no more children, that it will make them wise and enlighten them—that it will make men of them. Indeed, there are some persons who go so far as seriously to regard a course of sensual indulgence as a part of a man's education, and to argue that it prepares him for acting his part in life; and their theory is, that he throws aside after a time the grossness, and comes out of his sinful experience a formed man, expanded and matured, and arrived at his proper growth. Such is the way in which men give their

hearts to know wisdom, and to know folly and madness too.

These are the two kinds of moral experience we see in the world; and now I shall compare the two together, first as to their own character, and secondly with respect to their weight in the way of example to others.

First as to their own character. It is to be admitted that the moral impression which is gained by a course of sin is often a very acute and deep one. I mean that persons who have gone through long courses of sinful indulgence, in which they completely abandoned themselves to some favourite passion, whether the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, when they have got to the end of what the world can give them in this way, and the chain is fairly run out, do then in some cases feel the most awfully real and acute impressions of the utter nothingness of this world. It is no mere sentiment then, but it is a fact which fills and possesses them, as true as the heaven above and the earth below, that all is vanity. Then they know for a certainty that the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear with hearing; and they "hate life, because the work that is done under the sun is grievous to them."* There is nothing in the whole circle of human feeling and conviction deeper and more intense, than the insight into the emptiness and vanity of the world which men of the world have sometimes at the close of their career. It is stronger, it is more vivid even, than any passion they indulged in in that career. How clear everything is to them then! how

* Eccles. ii. 17.

unquestionable! What a fearful, an almost supernatural, enlightenment they have as to the real character of this world and its pride and pleasures! What sayings have been handed down to us in history and in the accounts of the lives of various men of this stamp—sayings in which they record the final result of their bitter and most sad experience! They gave their heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly, and they have succeeded thoroughly; they have known madness and folly first, and they have known wisdom next. They are now wise; that cannot be doubted. They know it, and feel it. But what after all does this wisdom which is gained by the experience of an evil life do for them? The great use of wisdom is to make men act aright. If it comes after all action is over it is useless; it is mere seeing for seeing's sake, and knowing for knowing's sake. Here, then, lies the difference between that knowledge which is got by an evil life and that knowledge which is got by a good one. In both cases there is a strong moral conviction gained; but in the case of moral conviction gained by an evil life the harm has been done; and the conviction comes, not to prevent the evil, but, only to acquaint you with it. You have been gaining experience by all this course of evil, it is true; but then you have been doing the evil all the time. All that evil that you have been engaged in is not as if it were nothing. It has not been idle; it has been producing its effect upon your soul. That effect remains in spite of any knowledge, however clear, which you may gain at last as to your course of life, and as to that world to which you have given way. You have

pursued objects of pride, I will say, and now see as clear as the day that all pride is folly. True, but then you have been proud. You have followed pleasures, and now see that all worldly pleasure is vain and evanescent; true, but then you have been carnal. You have got wealth, and now see that none of it can follow you; true, but then you have been covetous. The experience thus gained is not worth the means of gaining it; the lesson has ruined you before the truth has been imparted. This is the mistake which men who think that they shall gain knowledge by a course of contact with evil make. They entirely overlook the whole interval that lies before this result, and forget that they will have been all this time sowing to the flesh, and that sin will have reigned over them. I do not say that the experience which an evil life produces may not come in time to lead a man to repentance; but it too often does not; it comes upon a soul weakened and corrupted by the very means which have produced that experience, and therefore sadly disabled for any work of real repentance.

To state briefly then the difference between the convictions which the experience of good and the experience of worldly men produce, we may say in a word that it consists in faith. In the conviction of a good man there is faith. He started with taking it for granted that all evil would end in misery, and he would not even try it and make the experiment. He kept aloof from the world altogether, and would not tamper with it, because his faith was satisfied to begin with, and wanted no confirmation from actual contact and trial

that the world was corrupt. But in the conviction which is gained by an evil life there is no faith. The possessor would not trust anything but his experience, and accordingly his conviction is mere matter of experience when he gets it. Acute, and deep, and real, most awfully real, it may be; but no credit is due to him. It is forced upon him; he cannot help himself. The world must tell its own story eventually, and he can no more resist the effect of the experience of it upon him than he can withstand the force of the elements. One man is drawn by a tempting object; but he resists it. He goes on without contact with it; he keeps himself pure. This is faith; he is certain, without trying the object at all, that it will hurt him. And this is discipline too; for he resists the temptation at its strongest point; that is, when it is quite untried, and therefore most alluring. Another man is drawn by a tempting object, and he says, "I will try it. I shall at any rate get experience by it if it is noxious, and shall arrive at some deep truth in a more practical sense than I should otherwise have done." His knowledge then has no faith and no discipline in it. He has had all the pleasure of the sin, and he has only in the end to believe his own eyes in the conviction he arrives at.

The great trial of principle is to abstain from a forbidden thing in the first instance; not to taste it or to touch it; not to be caught by the attractions which the world and sense offer. If you try them, and see what they are, you have done the evil thing; and there is no merit in your seeing that evil when you have already given way to it.

In the next place, as regards the comparison of these two kinds of experience in the way of example to others, I cannot but think that the value of that experience at which men of pleasure and men of the world arrive at the close of their careers, and which they communicate to others, is very much overrated. However strong and acute it may be in itself, as regards its effects upon others it is feeble, and for this very good reason, that the man's advice is one way, and his acts have been in another. His example has been a bad one. He may say indeed that his experience is the more solid and weighty from the very fact that he has been so conversant with evil; but this is not the light in which other persons to whom he gives his advice will view it. Imagine such a man at the close of his long conversance with evil giving advice to another younger than himself, and speaking with the authority of wisdom to him. What is the answer that will naturally suggest itself to that younger person? He will say immediately, "Allow me to gain experience in the same way in which you have. You have done so by trying the world and its pleasures, and let me do it by the same. Let me follow your example as a whole. If I lead your life I shall then have your wisdom at the end of it." In this way the value of the man of the world's experience as regards others is very small. There are multitudes of books in the world which profess to give such experiences, and which do no sort of good, but rather a great deal of harm, in society, because, together with the result of the experience of evil, they excite people's desires and hankerings after

having that experience in the first place, and make them wish to know wisdom by knowing madness and folly also.

But take, on the other hand, a man who has arrived at wisdom by a good course of life, and see with what weight and authority he can speak, from the fact that his advice and his acts go together. He can appeal to his own experience of the advantage and happiness of a good life, and he can say, "I know this, not because I have followed evil, but because I have followed good." Such an experience as this appeals unanswerably, and there is no weak point to be found in it. He has acted his own advice beforehand, and he can call upon others to do what he has done. In this way, notwithstanding the strength and power with which men who have been conversant with evil can sometimes speak, there is nothing like the power of a good life as a memento to others. Everything else is feeble in comparison, and it alone speaks with command. Let no one look forward then to being able to do good by means of any experience he may gain by conversance with evil; and let no one excuse a worldly aim of life to himself on such a prospect. There is one, and only one, appointed way of doing good, and that is by being good.

*SERMON XVII.*

# Moses, a Leader.

"*This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and deliverer.*"—ACTS vii. 35.

IN the course of the Church's teaching we are now reading through the exhortations of Moses to the children of Israel to keep the law of God. This was at the conclusion of his life. We have been following Moses from the beginning of his life to the end—from the time that he was discovered in the river by Pharaoh's daughter, to the time when he gathered together the children of Israel for his last exhortations before he died. Let us, then, contemplate the character of this great prophet and leader.

God chose Moses to be the deliverer of the Israelites out of Egypt. Now first we see that in Moses which singularly fitted him to be the deliverer of His people. He had a noble disposition to succour the oppressed. He had a keen sense of wrong when witnessing the illusage of others; an indignation against injustice; a warm sympathy with the weak under the oppression of the strong. All people profess this sympathy, but in some it is a feeling which leads to action. It

was such a feeling in Moses, as the very first act which we read of his shows: when he saw one of the Israelites suffering wrong from an Egyptian, and he avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian. The Israelites were a poor despised race in Egypt, and the Egyptians illtreated them. Moses saw one of these cases of illusage, and it roused in him immediately this sympathy for the oppressed, and this indignation against oppression. So again in Midian, when he fled there, his first act was to stand up for the seven daughters of the priest of Midian who came to water their flocks at the well, whom the violent and unmannerly shepherds drove away.* They went home and told their father: "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hands of the shepherds, and also drew water enough for us, and watered the flock." This was the disposition of Moses, and therefore God chose him to be the deliverer of the children of Israel out of Egypt. God gave him that great and mighty work to do. God chooses for His instruments those who are adapted to be so, those who are worthy of being so. His instruments for great objects are not like machines or tools which a man uses for his work—dead things; they are living souls, which have that in them which makes them, so to speak, co-operators with God, loving and concurring with the work He gives them to do.

Again, Moses had this sympathy with the oppressed, when he was himself precisely in that situation which would tend to harden his heart, and make him callous and indifferent to their wrongs. He was trained in

* Exodus ii. 17.

a proud, luxurious court. When persons are brought up among those who oppress and domineer over others, and are accustomed to see from the day they are born their own relatives and friends treating those beneath them with scorn and illusage, how completely they view such treatment as a thing of course, that the one should receive it, and the other should give it! It never occurs to them to question the propriety of it; it looks like the course of nature. If the inferiors have always had such treatment, it seems to be their due, and to be proper and fit for them, because they have always had it. That is the feeling of one bred up among oppressors. But Moses was bred up among oppressors, and yet saw their tyranny in its true light. He was bred up among oppressors, and yet sympathised with the oppressed. The sense of truth and right, then, must have been doubly or trebly strong in him to make him see the falsehood of notions to the prevalence of which he was accustomed, in which he had been educated, and which had been instilled into him from his very infancy;—to make him, a favourite of Pharaoh's court, wish to deliver the children of Israel out of their bondage. But, it will be said, he was an Israelite himself, and therefore it was his interest, at any rate it would be his natural desire, to relieve his own kindred and race. But it is very well known that generally none are so unjust and insolent illusers of a despised class as persons lifted out of that class by favouritism, as Moses was; and transplanted into the domineering and oppressing class from the subject and oppressed one. These persons are generally the very foremost in the work of illusage; and the very know-

ledge that the place in which they are is not their natural place, but that they belong naturally to the despised and illused class, makes them so much the more eager in illtreating that class as a sort of retaliation for their own disadvantage in being, in spite of themselves, connected with it; and to show their great friends that the ties of blood have no hold on them. Moses, then, was under a peculiar temptation, because he belonged to the humiliated Israelitish stock, to disown it; but yet he made it the chief object of his concern, and its wrongs were the great thing he took to heart.

But connected with this noble impulse in Moses we see also at first a great fault. At first he was hasty, precipitate, and eager, which made him act on the spur of the moment, and think that the time had come for him to stand forward as the champion of his brethren before it had come. He wanted patience, and was not disposed to wait God's time. When he first smote the Egyptian who was illusing an Israelite, this was upon the idea that he was already the champion of the Israelites. He thought he was to set about delivering them immediately, before he had received any commission to do so; and that his countrymen would see this, and hail him immediately as their deliverer. As St. Stephen says, "He supposed that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them."* This was forestalling matters, and a heavy penalty he paid for this impatience—a forty years' exile. He had to flee into Midian, and endure a

* Acts vii. 25.

long sojourn in a remote and wild country, leading the life of a shepherd. He kept his father-in-law's flocks. What a change from the court of Egypt, and from court life, and the society of statesmen and men of letters! for we hear much of the learning and wisdom of the Egyptians in which Moses had been educated. How, as time went on in this long-distant sojourn, must he have almost given up the idea of the deliverance of his people as hopeless, a mere fancy of his younger days!

But now observe the striking effect of this Divine chastisement and discipline upon Moses. The very man who was at first so impatient to begin, and who by his hurry forestalled God's purpose, becomes, we may almost say, backward; not timidly backward, but still so little anxious or eager to take upon himself the office of deliverer, even when assigned to him, that he has to be stimulated and specially encouraged by God. He urges difficulties: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"* And when God has said, "Certainly I will be with thee," Moses still has difficulties. What has he to tell the Israelites about the God of their fathers? When they ask, "What is His name?" what is he to say to them? And when God has satisfied him on this subject of perplexity, he still doubts whether the Israelites will believe him: "Behold, they will not believe me . . . for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee." What a contrast to the man who forty years before expected the children of

* Exodus iii. 11.

Israel to recognize him as their deliverer, merely upon his own word or idea, before any evidence had been given that he was appointed to be so! And when miraculous power had been promised him, he still urged his own want of power of speaking: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent . . . but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."* He knew that men ordinarily wanted ready speech in their leaders, and that they were mainly governed by eloquence; and he looked upon his own defect in that respect as an unsurmountable obstacle to his success in the work: "O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send;"† that is, "Choose whom Thou wilt for this mighty office. I am not fit for it; I have not the necessary faculty for dealing with men"—command of speech; though in fact this knowledge of the gifts and powers which were ordinarily necessary to lead men, only showed how much more fitted he was for the office now than he was when he first, without examining his own qualifications at all, assumed it upon his own idea. And when he had undertaken the great work, and was in the middle of it, still his temper was now that of a man who always saw the full force of obstacles, and was the very opposite of sanguine and impatient. It tended even to despondency: "Lord, wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people?" he says, after the new hardship and task imposed by Pharaoh upon the people; "why is it that Thou hast sent me?"‡ The refusal of the Israelites to hearken to him at first

* Exodus iv. 10. † Exodus iv. 13.
‡ Exodus v. 22.

seemed to him to put a stop upon the whole scheme. His want of command of speech still oppresses him: "Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then will Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?"* Nor was it till the announcement was made to him, "I have made thee a god to Pharaoh,"† that he thoroughly took heart, and set about the work of deliverance in right earnest.

We remark then a real change in Moses' character. This is a fact which arrests our attention. A real change in the temper of any man is a wonderful thing. We rarely see it; so rarely that we are sometimes tempted to doubt whether there is such a thing. People change particular habits; they learn to control particular bodily appetites and passions; they may give up drinking, or gaming, or swearing; they may force themselves to do things which once they neglected to do; but if there is a deep fault at the root of a man, such as pride, jealousy, meanness, we may often see that fault disguised, moderated in its outward expression, and made to look more plausible; but, alas! how seldom do we see a really converted heart, a new-born man in the deepest and most vital parts of the character! The change in the disposition of Moses is revealed in such genuine acts, that it ranks with the other great changes of heart in Scripture; the change in him who once would have called down fire from heaven to consume those who opposed themselves to the truth, and who afterwards became the preacher of love; the change in him who was once Saul and afterwards Paul.

* Exodus vi. 12. † Exodus vii. 1.

Now although Moses is so great a leader, so strong in will, so unbending of purpose, so determined in fulfilling his mission and bowing the hearts of the stiff-necked people to the yoke of the divine law, yet we ever find this strong character of a leader combined with this love and affection for the people. It is this spirit,—the same spirit of sympathy which first caused him to be their champion in Egypt,—which makes him in the wilderness concern himself for, and feel their complaints, their unjust complaints, whenever they are uttered against him as their leader. He rebukes with the voice of a master and ruler, yet their complaints touch him. When the people chode with him in Rephidim, Moses said, "Why chide ye with me?" "And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel."* And at the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, he protests before God against the injustice done to his own tender care for the people's interests and rights, by the leaders of that rebellion. "Respect not Thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them."† The words are simple, yet what could have expressed better how far it was from the mind of Moses to set himself above the people because he was their ruler? to set himself above them in any sense of domineering over them? They show how, while he was their ruler, he was at the same time their champion; that he never lost in the height of his power his first sympathies with his people. And when the Israelites committed the great

* Exodus xvii. 2, 7. † Numbers xvi. 15.

sin of idolatry in making and worshipping the golden calf, his intercession with God for them was a perfect proof of his love for Israel. It was even, as we may say, atoning or sacrificial love. He wished, if it could be, that he could be punished as a victim for them. "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written."* How completely was he one in heart with the people whom he governed who could utter such a prayer!

And yet in the execution of his commission, and in the enforcement of the law of God, how stern and inflexible! In this very instance his holy wrath had lighted up upon the first sight of the idol, and with the exclamation, "Who is on the Lord's side, who? let him come to me," the work of divine vengeance began. He is thus the pattern of the good ruler, and stands in special contrast with the selfish ruler of the world's type. The successful ruler of the world's type is one who uses the weaknesses and the vices of mankind for his own personal advantage and exaltation. He maintains his own influence and position, not by curbing and restraining the follies and humours of the people, but by skilfully yielding and giving way to them; he quotes and misapplies the proverb of the oak and the sapling, one of which was uprooted by the storm because in its strength it withstood it; the other survived the storm because in its weakness it yielded to it. Thus by making himself convenient to men's corrupt wishes,

* Exodus xxxii. 31.

he keeps up his place in the world; he does not really care for the people's good, but only uses compliance with others to secure the exaltation of himself. Power is a selfish prize in his eyes. A good ruler, on the other hand, cares for the good of the people, and for that good will run the risk even of losing his own power. Moses, in resisting the vices of his people, has set the pattern of such a ruler. He did not maintain his power by giving way to them. He resisted their sins, he rebuked them, he punished them, while he loved them, and because he loved them. There is no love of the people in the successful man of power of the world's type; he thinks only of himself, of his own success, and of them as the means to it.

And thus Moses became the type of that King, over Whom was written the superscription, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews;" the type of that Good Shepherd, Who laid down His life for the sheep. "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." * Such is the worldly-minded ruler. Moses was a shepherd who cared for the sheep. He therefore himself prophesied of One Who was to come after him: "The Lord thy God shall raise up unto thee from the midst of thee a Prophet like unto me; unto Him shall ye hearken." † In His kingdom there is no using power for the sake of selfish pride. "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them . . . but ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." ‡

* John x. 13. † Deut. xviii. 15.
‡ Luke xxii. 25.

All rule in that kingdom is upon the motive of love. Of this kingdom and of the rule in it, the leadership of Moses was a shadow; not aiming at his own greatness, but at the good of the people only, with whom he was in heart united, and for whom he was ready to sacrifice even his own great name and place, could it have served the divine purpose. And let all of us remember that in any, however humble, office of authority we may be placed, we may in our own degree imitate him, by remembering always that such authority is only given us for the good of others, and that if it is regarded with pride it is a great abuse in the sight of God. Parents, masters, all who have others under them, whether children to educate and bring up, or men to employ, have power put in their hands which they may either use for the good of others, or for the indulgence of their own selfish and capricious fancies. Let them learn the sense of responsibility; let them cherish the truth that we are all made for each other, and not for ourselves only; and let them remember that they will one day have to give an account of the use which they have made of this talent committed to them.

*SERMON XVIII.*

# The Unjust Steward.

"*Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*"—LUKE xvi. 9.

THERE is probably no parable which more prompts the hearer to an investigation of motives and the subtle inconsistencies of the human heart than this of the unjust steward; none more suggestive, whether we consider our own evil tendencies, or look abroad on the conduct of mankind. And this especially, as it presents difficulties which seem to demand the exercise of our own reason and judgment for its right interpretation.

It is strange at first sight to see the unjust steward set up as an example, and it seems as if it were impossible to imitate him in a good way; and yet our Lord says that there is something to be extracted out of his line of conduct; that there is something in it to admire; that there is that in it which is worth copying, if we could couple it with another object and motive. We have sometimes to appreciate the superior points in unworthy characters—their industry, firmness, perseverance, prudence, courage, and the like—though we may run some risk in doing so, because the shining parts of a bad character are apt to lead us farther than

we ought to go, and to bring us within the infection of the evil. What is it then that we must copy in the unjust steward? There is evidently some peculiar lesson to be drawn from it.

The unjust steward, then, made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. This was the great thing he did; and the way in which he made friends of it was not grudging it to others. He dispensed this mammon on all sides of him; he dealt it out indeed when it was not his own to give; and he dealt it out for the purpose of shielding himself against the effects of an anticipated exposure. He does this most unscrupulously, and with the thorough determination of a man who knows the power of money, and is resolved to make money his friend—to have it on his side as his advocate, his champion, his defender; to plead for him, to justify him, or, at any rate, palliate his previous conduct to his master, in the eyes of that large class of people who are disposed to admire the open hand under any conditions. He knew too that when men get any great worldly profit out of another, and are extremely advantaged by something he has done for them, they do not scan very accurately the motives of his conduct, or make very jealous enquiries as to the occasion which has led to such a display on his part. We may indeed easily imagine that each one who profited by the liberality would find some plausible reason for the act of reducing the hundred measures to fourscore in his own case, and this posture of mind would make him an advocate when the news spread that the steward had been called to account by his master for misconduct in his stewardship.

An indulgent tone would prevail. One would say perhaps that he had heard an unfavourable report, but that he did not believe it; another, that difficulties and misunderstandings often take place in business transactions; another, that it was evident the master had not properly looked after his own property, and was not to be altogether trusted in his account of things; another, that he never meddled with other men's matters; another, that the steward had always borne a very good character, and that no charge had ever been brought against him before. Such is the language of the world towards men who diffuse their prosperity; while the different persons whom the steward had benefited would stand by the man who had served them a good turn, and act as a defence and protection to him against the consequences of his exposure. They would prop up his credit, and enable him to take his place in the world again after he had left his master. The steward knew very well this effect of making money, or the mammon of unrighteousness, his friend; and therefore he did, in real earnest and by the boldest steps, make friends of it. Still, though he dispensed mammon with a selfish motive, he did dispense it on all sides; he did not grudge others being benefited by the means through which he saved himself. Some would have said to themselves, "Why should I be benefiting others so largely when I am not at all sure that I shall gain by it; they will take the money, and speak against me all the same." But he, though he was dishonest and audacious, was not grudging; he dispensed the mammon, and took his chance of what he should gain by it.

We are told then, like him, to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; and we do this by copying this one quality—by not grudging this mammon to others. We must in the first place give away of the good things of this world which we possess to the poor and needy; and as it was good policy in the unjust steward to dispense liberally of the mammon in his keeping, so will this be our good policy in a Christian sense: "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again."* They, that is He representing them, as He tells us He does, will receive us into everlasting habitations, as those whom the unjust steward benefited would receive him into their temporal dwellings.

But this is not the whole of the lesson contained in the parable. That which the Scripture calls here mammon, or the mammon of unrighteousness, must be taken, in a large full sense, to mean all worldly advantages, the profit and gain of this world, that which the world has to bestow—prosperity and success in life. This is a subject in which we are all, and cannot help being, both on the part of ourselves and others, strongly interested. We are preparing indeed for another world; but in the meantime this is the world in which we live. We are placed here by God, and the measure of success which each one has in it must be matter either of decided trial or decided rejoicing to him. The way then in which we act and feel with respect to worldly success and advantage, both with regard to ourselves and others, is one great test of character, and of the

* Proverbs xix. 17.

sort of spirit we are of. We are speaking now of our regards to others on this subject. If our thoughts, feelings, and wishes with respect to others are such as we have no reason to be ashamed of, then, in the language of the text, we are making mammon our friend. It becomes a witness in our favour, a touchstone of our character which speaks for us. This mammon, this worldly profit, is indeed in itself transient and vanishing; the moth and rust corrupt it, and thieves break through and steal. It goes away at any rate with this life; but though a transient and perishing thing in itself, it is at the same time the test of an eternal principle within us. The worldly material is the test of a spiritual state of mind; whether we have all those feelings and wishes towards our neighbour which the law of love enjoins. The way which we actually feel towards others in regard to it is the criterion of the genuineness of the principle of kindness and goodness within us. It is so ordained and provided, and it is the result of our being in this world, that a worldly material is the touchstone of the divine principle of love. Poor and sordid in itself, it is a penetrating criterion of the sincerity of men's disposition, and the real state of their hearts; a most effective instrument of our probation here.

It is so in many ways; but I will single out that one to which the parable before us seems to point. There is a great and very common fault,—not perhaps so obvious as some faults, as having to do with our more inward feelings, which are often concealed from others, and even from ourselves,—the sin of

grudging others worldly prosperity. It is an inward sin, at least I call it so, because it often is very strong in men's hearts, while at the same time they are not in a position to do others any harm in consequence of having such a feeling; so that nothing comes of it. Nor is this feeling so inward but that they often show it by their remarks on others. It is, however, mainly a sin of the heart rather than a sin of the open and flagrant kind. Now I by no means say that when a man has obtained worldly prosperity by fraud and deceit that we are bound to take the least satisfaction in the good fortune of such a man; on the contrary, we must feel the greatest repugnance to any success which is the reward of ill-doing. And the Bible, though it tells us not to fret ourselves because of the ungodly, neither to be envious against the evil-doer, yet it only requires us to be resigned at his success—not to be disturbed, or agitated, or tempted to doubt God's providence in consequence of it—does not allow us to have other feelings than those of repugnance to it. But it must be seen that besides the just dissatisfaction we may have at other men's prosperity, there is a very common dissatisfaction, which arises not from any good reason, but from jealousy, because the jealous person does not like to see others obtaining what he desires for himself. Not that the success of others at all hurts him, but he derives an offence from it because it is the success of others, and not his own.

It requires but little knowledge of human nature to see how strongly mankind are affected by this jealous feeling, and how it penetrates everywhere wherever that

thing which Scripture calls mammon exists, wherever there are those temporary advantages which some get and others fail to obtain. With the poor anything like an access of comfort and a larger share of the necessaries of life is the thing thus called in Scripture. And everyone knows how much jealousy gathers about this thing—mammon in this form—in the poorer class, how sharply the distribution of the most needful benefits is watched, and how in a town or village one neighbour takes note of the share another gains. Among the rich and educated any addition of honour, or wealth, or station is the thing thus called. The wise and the learned have their mammon too, that portion in this life which suits them, and which they prize. Wherever there is this earthly good material then, of mammon under any form, it provokes and calls into existence the jealous and grudging character—the disposition which envies others, and would withhold good things from them if it could—a disposition which expresses itself perhaps with the greatest freedom in the poorer class, but which has its own way of expressing itself in all. How many there are who say they wish their neighbour to go to heaven, but who grudge them the least success in this world; who have no kind of objection that they should have spiritual treasures, but to whom any earthly prosperity coming to them is an offence.

When a man cherishes this jealous temper in company with high Christian professions, and consequently a deeper power of self-deception, he will sometimes put to himself his objection to another's success upon the ground that he is better without it; that Christians

should be content to be in a low place in this world, and that it is fitter for them. And this is very true, if it is the will of God in His temporal providence, that they should be deprived of advantages. Doubtless under such circumstances His grace can work in them, and can turn the inferiority of their lot to their higher perfection; but I am not sure that we are therefore justified in wishing our neighbour temporal ill-success; rather, may I not be sure we are not? Providence may indeed ordain it for him to his great profit, but that is a different thing from our wishing it him. In our wishes for each other we are bound to follow the law of kindness, which bids us wish well to each other even in this life.

Reading and observation show us that the jealous temper can turn even the Christian standard of humility to its own purpose. Christianity enjoins mortification; that is, we are told to mortify ourselves and our own desires for worldly advantages and gratifications. This evil temper extracts out of the law of self-mortification a sort of precept to mortify others (that is, as far as wishes go), to wish them mortifications and disappointments. It puts such wishes under the form of deep Christianity keenly entering into and embracing the Christian type of humiliation and surrender; but forgets that it is not self-abasement to wish others to occupy the lowest seat. The gospel law is that of self-denial and self-sacrifice; it is the voluntary surrender by a man of his own desire; it is something which in the nature of the case a man does for himself, and which it is not in another's place or power to do for him. If I mortify, so far as my wishes go, my Christian brother,

that certainly is not his self-mortification, and still less is it my own. However strongly, then, Christianity may enjoin humility and self-sacrifice, it cannot be our part to wish for our neighbour that which humiliates and disappoints him, under whatever disguise we may put such wishes to ourselves, and with whatever high standard we may couple them. I do not say that there are not particular cases in which success would be obviously to a man's injury, and in which it would be only charity to wish him failure; nor can we put any exact limit to what it may be charity to wish for others in the way of religious discipline, which will involve certain trials; but these wishes have another motive altogether from that on which I have been dwelling.

Regarding then all worldly advantages which God's providence allows to mankind as the mammon we are to make our friend, we cannot but see how far short of the precept men of all classes are apt to fall. No reflecting person indeed can look around him without seeing how much half latent and unconscious jealousy there is in the world, how much absence of good wishes, how much of a dull, negative spirit, how much poor defective goodness. We ask ourselves how it is that some who have given way to no flagrant sin have yet stopped short. Something has stunted them. What is it? It is often this: A secret jealousy in their character. Something has been wrong in their hearts towards their brethren, and this has acted like a drain upon them; for there is nothing that so retaliates upon the man himself as this meanness of nature. It dwarfs his whole character. He does not give good measure, pressed down

and running over, to others, and therefore he receives a small measure of grace himself. Men make friends of that which is called mammon when they do not grudge it to others. It then witnesses for them to their large-heartedness; but if they do it is their enemy, because it witnesses to a narrow selfishness. Scripture insists on visible tests of love to others when man is always wanting some invisible one. A man will say, "I love God," and make that his test; but St. John tells him that the test must be a visible one—the love of his neighbour. So again a man will say, "I wish all my neighbours to go to heaven," and make that his test of love; but Scripture tells him that he must prove his love by doing and wishing them good in this present world. It is a visible test of love which is insisted on. And again, it is a large test, and applies to all with whom we come in contact. The unjust steward made many friends by his use of his master's goods. The prudence and forethought shown by his acts, and not his motives, are commended by that master. We too must be liberal of our Master's, our heavenly Master's, goods; for all good things of this world belong to God: "Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might; and in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name."*

* 1 Chron. xxix. 12, 13.

*SERMON XIX.*

# Sowing to the Spirit.

"*He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*"—GALATIANS vi. 8.

THROUGHOUT the New Testament what we are spiritually is distinguished from what we are naturally. The natural man has one set of desires, the spiritual man has another. "The natural man," says St. Paul, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God."* It is not that all the desires of the natural man are in themselves wrong, that whatever he aims at and whatever he is interested in is in itself unlawful. We are placed in this natural world with certain things to do in it; certain interests and certain objects unavoidably arise in this world, and connected with this world. His fault is not that he is interested in some things, but that he is not interested in other things; not that he has some desires, but that he has not others. It was for what he has not that St. Paul blames him. "He receiveth not the things of the Spirit." There is a whole class of objects, aims, and interests, in which he is concerned as an immortal being, which do not the least

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

attract him, and with which he regards himself as having nothing to do. He is quite dead to these; they awaken no response in his heart. Talk to him about his schemes of business or his intellectual pursuits, and he is quite alive to the interest which they inspire; they bring out his mind, they elicit ardent feelings and aspirations. He is full of animation, full of impulse and action here. But speak to him about eternal things, about a future life, and about the way of getting to heaven, and he immediately shows an entire want of sensibility to these ideas; he does not take hold of them, the spiritual world is a world quite foreign to him, and he does not feel that he has anything to do with it.

This is the defect, then, of the natural man. First he has no desire for immortality. This is the desire which is always assumed in the New Testament as lying at the root of all spiritual life, of all growth in holiness. If a man is to sow to the Spirit, he must first believe in spirit; he must believe that he is a spirit, that he is not a mere part of this world, to vanish away and perish like the herb of the field when his day here is over. "In the morning it is green, and groweth up: but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered." He must not be satisfied with this prospect for himself. The idea of coming to nothing, and ceasing to be, ought to be a dreadful one. He ought to desire with his whole soul and strength to live for ever; that is, upon his departure from this life to enter upon another and a happy life which will never end. This is the first great spiritual desire that belongs to man, and it is

referred to throughout the New Testament as the beginning and foundation of the spiritual life. If this desire seizes forcible hold of a man, he then looks out seriously and anxiously for the proper means of securing this issue to himself. He "lays hold on eternal life," as St. Paul expresses it; that is, he sets to work in real earnest to take those steps which conduce to gaining this great prize. Such was the first thought of the jailor at Philippi. Suddenly rescued from impending death—for he was evidently under the apprehension of the immediate punishment of death had his prisoners escaped—delivered, I say, in a moment from this terror, yet, with the full impress of that terrible prospect upon his mind, he felt himself a perishing creature. He, as it were, said to himself, "Though I am rescued from death just now, yet I shall die one time, and then where shall I go to?" And this thought forced from him the earnest exclamation, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" As soon as he realized death, he felt the desire to live after death; and as soon as he felt the wish to live after death, he was urgent to know what he should do to obtain that eternal life and the salvation of his soul. He was seized all at once with the true impression of the utter transiency of this world, that it was passing away and everything with it; and he desired to know how, amid the wreck of all things, he was to secure the preservation of his own soul in another world. And this is the order in which the concern and anxious resolution to secure their own salvation comes in the lives of Christians generally. They are seized with a deep sense of the reality of death; they then

desire earnestly and strongly to live after death; they then are solicitous to know what they must do to attain this everlasting life, and they set about a good and holy life. But first of all they must be seized with the desire for immortality; this is the first great spiritual wish which enters into the mind.

But the natural man has not this first great spiritual desire. He has not been seized with the earnest and real wish for a future life in the first instance. To desire that he must realize another world; but he is entirely bound by this world in all his thoughts, aims, and wishes; in fact, he identifies life and existence altogether with this world, and life out of this world is a mere name to him. He does not therefore desire it, because he has no belief in it; and you must have some real belief in a thing before you wish for it. And thus it is but too true that many a great man, and many a man who has filled a large space in this world, and has exhibited the most surprising faculties and intellectual gifts in carrying on the system of things here, has passed through life without having once felt the real desire to live beyond it. He may have used the words which are customary on this subject, and which the language of religious men supplies him with, but he may never once have felt the real inward desire to gain an everlasting life. He is alive now; he looks forward to being alive to-morrow, and the day after, and to a future life in this world of an indefinite length: that satisfies him. He is so filled and occupied with the sense of life, the sense of the life he is now living, that this sensation thrusts out all others. His schemes

of pleasure or business, his plans in life, his activities private or public, or mere routine, or whatever be the sort of life he leads, are his all, beyond which nothing exists to him. Did he realize an end to all this, it would indeed be different; the real wish then would enter his heart to live beyond that end; but he is so full of the things themselves, that he does not think of their ending. It is all endless to him; this life is to him without an end. Then it is absurd that he should wish to live beyond it; he cannot really entertain the desire. He is shut up within the walls of the flesh, and within the circle of its own present aims and projects.

The first great spiritual desire then,—that for the soul's immortality and the life everlasting beyond the grave, cannot belong to this man. And this it is which constitutes the first distinction between the natural man and the spiritual man. The natural man is without the proper desire for immortality; the spiritual man, as is ever conspicuously put before us in Scripture, has this desire strong in him, and it is the beginning and the foundation of the religious life which he leads here.

2. But this is the second point that we come to; viz., the sowing to immortality, the laying up in store a good foundation against the time to come, that we may attain eternal life. This is the same as that sowing to the Spirit spoken of in the text; for the spirit is the immortal part of us. We must believe indeed in eternal life before we can sow to it, but when we have the belief we must still sow. Those who are convinced of the truth of, and who earnestly desire to reap, this everlasting life, must sow to everlasting life. What is

sowing then to everlasting life? and what is the course of action and mode of life which this phrase "sowing to life everlasting" expresses, as distinguished from that mode and course of life which is sowing to the flesh? Now the first thing which we observe as to the sort of life and action, which desire for immortality and eternal life inspires, is also the most important; it is this, that as soon as the soul is really seized with the desire for everlasting life, the sort of actions which it takes interest in, and which attract it, and which it wants to do for the sake of its own individual prospects and hope of gaining this eternal life, are not any actions connected with profit or greatness in this world, but simply good actions. Like the jailor of Philippi, it asks, "What must I do to be saved?" and the answer of St. Paul then is the answer still. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The soul is thus awakened to the duties of faith and prayer to God, and of love and charity to our neighbour. As soon as she has embraced the desire to be immortal and to live after death, a desire to do good works immediately arises in her. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness," our Lord says. It is this strong wish to do righteousness, to do duties to God and man, which accompanies the strong desire for immortal life. Why? Because we know that it is goodness alone which is the enduring and immortal thing in man; and that by it alone can we fasten ourselves on to eternity, and "lay hold on eternal life."

Every field of action then, as soon as the desire for immortality has entered the mind, becomes unimportant,

trifling, and insignificant, compared with the simply doing good things; because in that simple exercise of goodness lies the preparation for eternity. All the highest exercise of the faculties upon the arena of this world, and to gain its rewards, then seem poor and trivial compared with simply good actions performed for their own sake; because the former, however grand and brilliant, having a worldly object and purpose, is after all but a sowing to the flesh; the latter is a sowing to everlasting life. It is sowing, and sowing to the flesh, when persons take a great deal of trouble, and apply a large amount of intellectual power, or at any rate much industry and perseverance, to gain merely selfish and worldly ends; sowing, because persons do take the proper means to gain their ends, and do not grudge their trouble; sowing to the flesh, because the ends for which this labour is undergone are only connected with this life. In laying these tasks upon themselves these men are sowing to the flesh, and will with the flesh reap corruption. These ends when gained are not lasting, but short and transient. But to persons possessed with the desire for the world to come, all this action looks like trifling with life; they want to do something which will really do them good in eternity. They can only attach importance to that which is final and lasting. All kinds of actions are welcome to them, and they catch at them, so to speak, which seem to give them a deeper hold on in eternity. All works are welcome to them, which they do as eternal beings, as spiritual beings, and not as mere members of this world. They like to feel themselves acting upon eternal principles

for an eternal object. And this—the vastest and brightest wish and conception which the human mind can form—expresses itself by the simplest and humblest actions. There can be no vaster and higher wish than that for life eternal; yet the fruits of this wish and the manifestations of it are acts of plain goodness, of conscience, and lowly charity. This result is often especially conspicuous in good persons as they grow old, and feel themselves drawing closer to the eternal world. The most humble actions, in point of form and material, perform this service for them, they make them feel what they want to feel, that they are qualifying themselves for—laying up a foundation for—eternity. And especially upon such persons' death-beds is this love of simply good and conscientious actions for their own sake, conspicuous and permanent. Then the truth stands out irresistibly before men's eyes, what the only eternal treasure is. Then it is, when they stand on the extreme confines of this life, that the desire "to lay hold on eternal life" is most strong and earnest; and the value of goodness and holiness as the access to this life is the most clear and undoubted. Even religious gifts and powers, when not strictly identical with personal religion, appear valueless. The simplest, plainest, and sincerest sort of goodness is the only thing cared for. All else goes for nothing, or for not much. "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away: but charity never faileth." Even persons who have led careless lives, then see the incalculable worth of goodness, as giving people the only hold upon the life everlasting.

The natural man and the spiritual man then are divided from each other by these distinctions: first, one has the desire for everlasting life, the other has not; secondly, one labours to attain that life, the other does not. Both of these men sow, but they sow according to their real belief. The one believes in spirit, and he sows to the Spirit—he believes that he is a spiritual being designed for a spiritual world, and he takes the means to gain that end; the other only really believes in this life, and the scope of all his plans and his industry is something included in this life. And as they sow, so do they reap. "He that soweth to the flesh doth of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." The success of the one perishes with the corruptible life to which it belongs; the success of the other endures for all ages in the world to come. In commemorating then the commencement of the dispensation of the Spirit, as we do on this Whit-Sunday, let us fix upon our mind what is the real difference between the natural and spiritual man, and especially the first great distinction between them—that the one has a belief in spirit, in his own spiritual nature; the other not. "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" But a man must first believe that he has a soul; he must not hold the truth in words only; he must be impressed with the weight of the truth; it must strike home to him; and then, believing with all his mind in the Spirit, he will sow to the Spirit.

*SERMON XX.*

# True Religion a Manifestation.

"*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"—MATTHEW v. 16.

THERE is at first sight a contrariety between this precept and the great gospel law of humility. Humility tends to people keeping back their graces, and virtues, and good deeds. So far from making them to be seen by others, it checks the exhibition of them in the eyes of others; it prohibits display, and represses the desire so natural to man to have his merits seen, and to reap their reward in the praise and admiration of others. And to this purpose are many precepts of the gospel: "Do not your alms before men, to be seen of men." "Do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, that they may have glory of men." "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." This precept, on the other hand, is to the effect that men should make their goodness to be seen; that is, that this should be done of set purpose, and as part of their Christian duty, and they should even have this expressly in view. There is at first sight

therefore something of a contradiction between the text and some other precepts of the gospel.

But upon a closer examination we shall find no disagreement between the precept in the text and the other set of precepts; because, when we are told not to do our good works "to be seen of men," the motive upon which men act in the manifestation referred to here is quite different from that upon which men act in the manifestation which is enjoined and recommended. The exhibition which is forbidden is upon one motive; the exhibition which is commanded is upon another. When men are bidden not to aim at others seeing and knowing their goodness and religion, the wish they are assumed to have in this condemned manifestation is, "that they may have glory of men." This is a motive which is strongly reproved in Scripture as contrary to the law of humility, and therefore the manifestation of ourselves in the sight of others, which takes place upon this motive, is reproved too. But when men are bidden "to let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works," it is assumed that they will make this manifestation of themselves upon another and totally different motive; viz., that others beholding it may glorify their Father which is in heaven. In the one case the motive is vain-glory; in the other the motive is the glory of God.

It is therefore the design of God that His true servants should show the world around them what they are, and should not only possess love, faith, and the other fruits of the Spirit within their own hearts, but should manifest their religious character to the world, and let

it be seen that they are of such and such a temper and will; that they have such and such affections, and aims, and hopes. It was never intended by God that religion and goodness should be a secret locked up in the heart itself, which none should know but the individual himself, and that it should pass from birth to the grave an unseen treasure. It was intended that goodness should be seen, and that the sight of it should inspirit others. It was intended that the minds of others should be raised, and their affections warmed, by the sight of it, that thus every good man should spread a circle of light round him. It was designed that one good man should make other good men; and this is one great way in which God is glorified by the goodness of good men being manifested, because the manifestation of it is a living power of example. It is indeed impossible that goodness should be an unseen thing. Men express their minds and dispositions whether they will or no; they reveal their aims and the wishes of their hearts to those about them whether they intend it or not; they reveal them in a hundred indirect and indefinite ways; they manifest their own character, whether it is good or bad, self-interested or simple-minded, crafty or sincere; whether their hearts are set upon the things of this world, or have other aims. If men then really are of a good and religious character, they cannot help showing it. Others see it; it is observed in their neighbourhood. They are known to be good people, and to have set their affections on things above. There must at any rate be some—their family, their friends, or at least the more intimate and

congenial of these—to whom their character is known. And this unconscious way of manifesting character, of "letting our light so shine before men, that they see our good works," is doubtless one, if not the chief and principal, way of fulfilling the precept in the text. If people are in earnest, however little they think of showing it, it is seen. And the text, in enjoining on men to show their love and faith, is so far only enjoining on them to *have* love and faith; to have them really and in their hearts, and not professedly; for if they really have these graces, they will, without designing it, show them. Their light will shine before men without themselves intending it.

But again there is a sense in which we ought to let our light shine before men, by intention and design, and to have this as an object before us.

We are intended by God to be witnesses for Him in the world; to bear witness to the truth of religion, to the power and excellency of the gospel, to the certainty of the great doctrines which have been revealed to us; and on this account it is necessary that our light and good works should shine before men. The greatest testimony which can be given in behalf of divine truth is the testimony of our lives. If persons lead such lives that only one explanation can be given of them, one motive assigned to them, viz., a hearty belief in the gospel; that is testimony to the truth of the gospel; it is the witness of the man's whole soul. Such a belief as this excites others' belief. We are bound then to give this testimony, and to give it with the purpose that others should see it. Besides the unconscious

manifestation of goodness, which simply proceeds from persons being good in earnest—a fact which must show itself whether they intend it or not—we must not forget that the precept, "Let your light so shine before men," also includes an intentional showing of our religious character in the sight of men when it is called for. It may often be our duty to make other people see what manner of spirit we are of; nay, even to force it upon their notice when they are unwilling to see it. People may easily not do justice even to their goodness and seriousness, if they allow others to shut their eyes to it, and by shutting them to escape the lesson and the example which such a character is. The grace of God, where it has been bestowed, makes the possessor of it bold and open in showing what God has done for him, that it may have its proper power and influence.

Now such being the gospel view of the necessity of our light shining before men—of men's goodness and religion being not kept as a secret in their own hearts, but made visible and manifest to the world; and this expression and open disclosure of it being in fact a part of true goodness itself, and essential to its very life and reality,—it is important to observe that this large and animated gospel view is opposed to a very favourite corrupt notion of the human heart, in which it is apt to encourage itself almost more than in anything else, and in which it does encourage itself notwithstanding all the declarations of the gospel to the contrary; viz., to this notion, that a man may be a true Christian, and yet a secret Christian; that he may be a Christian by a mere inward feeling and sentiment which he has

cherished through life, without any active manifestation of the principle in his course and standard of life; in a word, that a man may be a true Christian, and yet not a witness to Christianity. This is impossible. A man indeed can only be a witness so far as he himself is seen and known, but so far as his presence extends, he cannot possibly be a true Christian without being also a witness to Christianity. Yet this is what is very commonly thought. Take a man who, without being guilty of gross offences, has still made life a field for the pursuit of self-interested aims. There are of course too many such persons, and the leading motives of their lives are conspicuous and obvious. There is a large class of such lives that are perfectly understood, and make but one impression upon those who view them. Now how could one of these men possibly say at the end of his life that he had been a witness to Christianity? A man can only be a witness to the Christian faith if his life can only be accounted for by Christian faith; but such a man's life does not require any Christian faith at all to account for it, only the most ordinary natural motives, such as a heathen might have. His whole seen life, on the contrary, is a witness to the power of the world and its motives. But though such a man could hardly himself say that he had been a witness to Christianity, he would still be shocked to think that he had not been a secret Christian, a Christian inwardly. He would appeal to a certain inward sentiment which he had always cherished, and never given up. He would say, perhaps, "Ah! nobody can tell what good thoughts I

have had; what impressions I have had within, though my outward life has not been a manifestation of them."

Now this is the special idea of religion against which the gospel, in its demand on men for the manifestation of their goodness in the eyes of others, warns us. The gospel declares that goodness must be visible, must show itself, must be an object for the minds of those around it to rest on, otherwise that there is no real goodness. Those indeed who display their good qualities in order to gain the praise of men are reproved, but not because they manifest their goodness to others, but because they manifest it from a wrong motive. Everywhere the gospel proclaims the truth, that religion, the religion of the heart, must be a visible and open thing; that the spiritual life of the soul must manifest itself, must come into sight; otherwise that it is a delusion in men to suppose that they really have it. That the thing is manifested in some way—indirectly perhaps, but still manifested to men—is made a test of its existence. Has such a one to human eyes done nothing but what he might have done without Christian faith? Then he has not had Christian faith. It is not open to men to say it was not seen, but it was inward. If it was really inward, it would have been seen; if it was inward, it would have been outward too. Think of the true Christians you have known. Could those Christians have been such without being known? It is not necessary indeed that grace should reveal itself in us by adopting a singular course of life, or that it arrest attention by public actions, or that it should be known to a large number. These are accidents, and the mani-

festation which the Scripture requires does not stand in need of them, and can take place as well without them. By the Christian's light shining before men, or his character being seen, it is only meant that it is seen by those—be they more or be they fewer—who have the opportunity of recognizing it, who know him sufficiently well, and who are themselves capable of recognizing a Christian character when they see one. That is all that is meant by a manifestation of goodness; and such a manifestation, the gospel says, there must be if there is any goodness to be manifested. The life of the good man must be such as to make an impression on those around—such that those looking at it see that there is something spiritual, some grace in the heart, of which this life is the expression. The sight of it, though it may be the most quiet, and in events the most ordinary life possible, must affect us with the sense of the presence of good and right aims and affections in the person.

Yet with what self-flattering, self-deceiving tenacity does the human heart cling to the notion of a secret goodness, a secret religious spirit, which is no visible or open thing, which is expressed in no form or course of life, in no aims or purposes of life, in no rule of life. The gospel is for an open, men are for a secret, religion. They think they can lock up a hidden Christianity in their own breasts, that they can carry it there safe through life, never show it, never reveal it in their course of life, wholly disconnect it with the part they play in the world—that they can live and die with this unknown treasure in their keeping, and that it will

save them. When a man has to all appearance lived a life for this world, and this world only, when that is the only impression he has made upon everybody, when that is the only spectacle he has presented to the world, he still clings to the notion that he has been all the time religious inwardly. The rich and great man lays claim to this inward treasure at the last. He says, "I have been religious within." The poor man does the same; he too says, "I have had my religion in my heart; nobody knows what good thoughts I have had." Their religion, it is true, has not gone abroad; nobody has seen it, no one has known of it, but it has been there all the time nevertheless, fast shut up in their own minds. Yet who was it who kept his treasure in a napkin, who hid it in the earth, and when his Lord came said, "Lo, there thou hast that is thine"? Was that hidden treasure of much value to the possessor? No; and it is the same with all goodness and religion which has not manifested itself, which has not shone out before men in open day. You may be quite sure of one thing: if nobody has seen your religious character, you have not had it. All religion which has never been seen by any one will serve its owner one day, just as that one pound in the earth served its self-deceived possessor. This idea of a secret goodness is only in fact a mode of separating the belief of Christianity from all practice of Christianity. A man upon this idea cherishes the Christian law as an inward sentiment, but all his aims and plans of life may proceed in utter disconnection with it. In practice he regards himself as a free man—free from the law of Christianity, with liberty to

act for what objects and on what motives he pleases. He is under no yoke. But tell him that he is bound to show his goodness and religion, to manifest it to others, and he immediately feels that he is under a yoke, that he has something to do, that a visible religious character is a tie upon him, and that he has to satisfy, even in this world, a judge who will say, "I want to see your religion." This is the Christian yoke, this is the Christian test, and this is the Christian law: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven."

*SERMON XXI.*

# St. Paul's Exaltation of Labour.

"*But rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*"—EPHESIANS iv. 28.

WHEN we look on one side of St. Paul's character, it is so full of spiritual fervour and rapture, there is such aspiration in it, such ardent pursuit of large ends, he is so wrapped in his great mission to convert the world to the revelation of Jesus Christ, that, arguing from what we know of men, we should be inclined to expect that his high spiritual mission would have drawn his mind away from the humbler duties of man, and from thinking much of ordinary life. We should know that he must recognize such duties, but we should not expect him to dwell upon them, to have them much on his mind, and to be always recurring to them. But it is remarkable that with St. Paul this is the case. Though his lofty and spiritual flights carry him so much above the ordinary world and its cares, he is yet particularly impressed with the great worth of humble duties. He often recurs to the plain and quiet work of humble life. It is a favourite subject with him. He is impressed with it himself; he wants to impress it upon

others. He calls attention to it again and again, and enforces not only the duty of it, but how high the duty ranks, and, if it is done well, how it raises those who do it. It has no low place in the scale in his estimate, as if it were necessary to be done, but did not rank as religious work. No; he regards it as a spiritual work, and elevating work.

Thus with respect to manual labour; he often recurs to it, and every time to exalt it. So in the text to the Ephesian converts, "Let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good;" and again to the Thessalonians, "That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we have commanded."* He had himself experience of manual labour; he was himself a tentmaker, as we are told in the Acts, and he worked at his trade at intervals while he was preaching the gospel. He alludes to this in the epistles: "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we should not be chargeable to any of you."† We see the result of this experience of his own in his estimate of honest labour in others. When men have done any duty themselves, they know what it is; they know what difficulties there are in it; they know the temptations there are to leave off the steady performance of it. When men have not done it, and know nothing of it by experience, they are apt to depreciate it, as if it were easy to be done. St. Paul, having worked with his own hands, appreciated the sterling test of honest attention to work. He knew

* 1 Thess. iv. 11. † 2 Thess. iii. 8.

what temptations there were to relax, and to give in to the sense of tediousness, day by day and hour by hour. In the midst, then, of all the abundance of his revelations, when he had been caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, he still bears upon his mind the impress of this experience of his, and of the solid excellence of manual labour, as a duty and a test, in those to whose lot it falls. After visions, after being taken up to the third heaven, after being in states in which he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body, manual labour is still a strong point with him.

It is evident, *e.g.*, that St. Paul sympathizes with the honest work of a slave of his day. There were no free servants in St. Paul's age, and those who did the household and other work in the houses and on the estates of the richer class were slaves. St. Paul refers to slaves often in his epistles, and always in a way which shows that he respects their calling to steady labour; and thinks highly of it. Thus he is not forward, when the question is raised, to urge the slave to exchange his state for that of a free man, as if he were giving up work which degraded him for work which exalted him; he says indeed, "If thou mayest be made free, use it rather."* Still he says, "Art thou called being a slave? care not for it;" as if he said, "You can still lead a high Christian life though a slave; you can do humble, but hard and steady work, and it is a great thing to do that. For," he adds, "he that is called in the Lord being a slave, is the Lord's freeman;" *i.e.* he is in the

* 1 Cor. vii.

Lord's sight as good as his master, a son of God though a servant to man. And in the same spirit he checks the tendency in converted slaves to feel above their calling, because as Christians, and in God's Church, they were on a level with their masters. "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour; and they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren."* St. Paul, who honours the industry of a slave, will not allow it to be dishonoured by the slave himself thinking himself superior to it; and discourages all high flights which set him at enmity with his work, and draw him away from the sterling Christian yoke of humble labour to which he has been called in God's providence.

At the same time the Apostle does not honour all industry: far from it. He always reprobates the covetous, money-getting spirit. He even says, "The love of money is the root of all evil," and he calls covetousness idolatry. This covetousness is indeed connected often with the most active and persevering industry; there is no motive to active exertion, to unflagging attention, to unwearied resistance to all difficulties, so strong as money-getting; or which produces such habits of industry. But it is not industry alone, and as such, that St. Paul admires. He admires industry, but it must be industry which is consecrated by the motive; and the motive which he requires for it is that of duty—when a man fulfils in the fear of God the task which is allotted to him. Many men can be industrious enough if they

* 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2.

are allowed an avaricious motive for it; but though St. Paul does not condemn the natural rewards of industry, which come in the shape of the fruits of trade, he does forbid the eager pursuit of wealth. And what he has principally before his eye is a laborious calling which brings in only a decent maintenance, where the motive is a conscientious one, and there is no mixture of pride and ambition.

But the eye which St. Paul has to the goodness of humble labour, is only a sample of a general predilection in him, which extends to other qualities. It is remarkable how, with all the spiritual soarings of his mind, and that constant vision of heavenly things before which he lived—how, I say, when he comes to lay down the qualifications for any order in the Church, he appears to choose, as it were purposely, the most plain and sober tests of fitness. Thus when he describes the character of the women who should be received into the order of widows, which was a kind of ecclesiastical order the Apostles had set up to perform charitable works in the Church, he gives a list of humble duties. They must be given to prayer and devotion; but they must also have shown their piety at home, and requited their parents. Such an one must, he says, "be well reported of for good works, have brought up children, have lodged strangers, have washed the saints' feet," *i.e.* have entertained good persons hospitably in their houses, "have relieved the afflicted."* So again "the aged men must be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience."†

* 1 Tim. v. 4. † Titus ii. 2.

There is a sobriety which pervades all their characteristics. And the same standard is still more remarkable when he comes to the qualifications of so high an office in the Church as that of a Bishop. Had one of the boasting, aspiring sects which broke off from the Church in early times described the qualifications for this office, it would probably have demanded as a necessary condition extraordinary gifts of illumination and eloquence. Compared with them, what sober qualifications does St. Paul lay down! "A Bishop must be blameless; ..... not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate."* What quiet, weighty words! Again, he must be "one that ruleth well his own house; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?"† So of the Deacons: "They must be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre."‡ What a sober, practical, and plain set of tests! How little of an ambitious character in them! All this then is of a piece with St. Paul's estimate of humble labour. He chooses the sober and plain class of duties as his test; and that at a time when, as the Apostle of the Gentiles, who was charged with the conversion of the Gentile world, one might suppose beforehand that he would have been on the look out for an aspiring enthusiasm alone as his instrument, at the cost, if it were necessary, of the plain and sober kind of virtues. But nothing tempts St. Paul away from his standard. In

* Titus i. 7. † 1 Tim. iii. 4. ‡ 1 Tim. iii. 8.

the case of the Bishop, he even specially inserts a condition which guards against a mere impetuous form of enthusiasm: he must not be a novice, lest he should be lifted up with pride.* Novices, however, would by their greater vehemence and ardour have recommended themselves to many propagators of religion as the most suitable agents to employ. But St. Paul has in his eye the insolence of new proselytes as well as their zeal. Others might have used their boldness and force, and have given position to it; thinking they were doing well for their cause; others might overlook their want of humility for the sake of their ardour; he will not. He will not put them in places which will do them harm by encouraging their faults. St. Paul has an insight into the spiritual, inflated type of mind. He knows the character; and guards against its obtaining influence in the Church. So in describing by anticipation the great Apostacy, he gives a list of the qualities which would characterize it, and great spiritual pride and pretension are conspicuous among these; that it professes greater sublimity and purity than the divine law itself, and treats as wrong many things which God Himself has allowed. There were some in his day who encouraged themselves to leave off ordinary working, and go into flights of speculation instead—of such he said, "He is proud, knowing nothing."† It is the yoke of this kind of duty which St. Paul particularly elevates. A man doing well duties, not of a showy sort, for which he gets no particular credit, this is his rule of fitness for a conspicuous post, and a post of authority. Men form

* 1 Tim. iii. 6. † 1 Tim. vi. 4.

their religious standard by two distinct tests; one the law of conscience and obedience to God; the other what is striking to man. Of these two St. Paul's test is very easily seen to be the former. Throughout his epistles he recurs constantly to it. His standard is seen in his sympathy with the work of the ruler of a household, with the work of a father or mother of a family, the work of hospitality and attention to strangers, the work of common trades and callings, the work even of the slave in doing his assigned daily tasks.

We see, then, the spirit of this great Apostle—how it embraced the whole appointed lot of man, from his highest to his most humble field of employment. He rejected nothing as mean or low that came by God's appointment; all was good, all was excellent, all was appropriate that He had commanded. And as in the beginning God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good, so all the labour, which God had called man to, was good—had a high and holy end, and was part of that great trial which was to prepare him for another world. This was not the view which the heathen took of humble labour. They exalted great exploits and prowess in war; they extolled athletic feats and victories; and whatever discipline and exercises were necessary to achieve these ends, were thought much of by them. So too they had a high idea of labour of mind, which brought out great gifts of intellect, and by which great knowledge was obtained. They valued all labour by which men became eloquent, or became able soldiers or statesmen. But they had not the slightest

respect for the ordinary work of mankind; it was so much mere drudgery in their eyes, which was necessary for the comfort of the rich, but which conferred no benefit whatever, and no honour at all, upon the poor who went through it. However faithfully performed, it was all servile work in their idea. They thought this world made for the rich. How different is St. Paul's view! No work allotted to man is servile work in his eyes, because he has an insight into what faithful labour is—what strength of conscience it requires, what resistance to temptations and snares it demands. He perceives the moral and spiritual worth of it. This enlightenment in human things, and insight into the state and condition of man in this world, was produced by the knowledge of God. The heathen because they did not know God were in the dark about man too. They mistook what elevated him and what lowered him, and were without discrimination on this subject. But the gospel taught men that God created nothing common or unclean. This great truth raised the rank of everything in the lot of man as made by God. "Every creature of God is good," says St. Paul, "and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving."* And what was true of meats was true of everything that God had made; and as He had ordained every kind of human labour, every kind of human labour was good and worthy of man, and to be held in respect and honour. The gospel then said, "Honour all men." It did not confine honour to one class; it dispensed it to all, rich or poor, who did their proper work

* 1 Tim. iv. 4.

in the world. Ordinary human labour was seen by this light from heaven to have that in it which it was not seen to have before. The heathen contempt for it was the contempt of ignorance; they were misled by false lights, and thought only of what was glorious in man's eyes. The gospel jealously guards it from depreciation, and not only from that arising from heathen ignorance, but also from what springs out of Christian pretension; *i.e.* the mistaken zeal of perverted Christians, who set up some peculiar standard which is evidently not fitted for mankind at large, and who despise all common callings and modes of life.

The Bible from first to last gives honour to manual labour. Adam was set in a garden to dress it and keep it. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had flocks and herds, and Jacob led a simple shepherd's life for many years, and said, "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. . . . . God hath seen the labour of mine hands."* Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law.† David tended sheep. Elisha was taken from the plough. The New Testament takes up the lesson. The Birth was announced to the shepherds. Our Lord was a carpenter by trade. He chose His Apostles from men who were earning their livelihood by fishing, and He called them as they were mending their nets, or in their boats. St. Paul was a tentmaker, and he, as we have seen, everywhere honours the labour of man's common callings. So little way have we to go for a road to heaven if

* Gen. xxxi. 40, 42. † Exod. xi. 1.

we want one. It lies in the duties immediately about us.

The word of God consecrates the ordinary work of man; it converts it into every one's trial, and as his special trial, his special access to a reward also—to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," reserved in heaven for us. "Say not in thine heart who shall ascend into heaven, or who shall descend into the deep: for the Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thine heart."

*SERMON XXII.*

# Jeremiah's Witness against Idolatry.

"*Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears.*"—JEREMIAH xxvi. 11.

IT was one of the great offices of the ancient prophets to tell the people of their sins, and sometimes to foretell the judgments which were coming upon them in consequence of them. Thus Jeremiah had to denounce the idolatries of the people, and to warn them of the Babylonian captivity which was approaching as a punishment of them. For this he was persecuted, and his life was made bitter to him; he became an object of offence and scandal to the nation, and especially to its priests and rulers. He says of himself, "I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day."* He was, being himself a man of a meek and gentle temper, obliged by the Spirit of God to witness against the wickedness of the people, and for this he was an object of hatred to them. And yet was there any doubt about the facts of the case? One would suppose beforehand that if a prophet of God is hated because he reproaches

* Lam. iii. 14.

the people with certain sins, that the people must be able to defend themselves against his charges, and to say that they do not do what he says they do. But could they say this? No. There was no disguise. What the Jews and their rulers did was done in open day.

Let us first take their idolatry. One might suppose beforehand that a people that called themselves the people of God, that owned His covenant, and were professedly believers in the law of Moses, would at any rate hide their idolatry; and that if they felt inclined to practise it, they would practise it in holes and corners. But was it so? By no means. Go for example to the twenty-third chapter of the second book of Kings, and read the account of what went on among the Jews in those times. Read the list of profane rites, altars, and images. It is enough to astonish any one who comes with the idea that the Jewish nation was the worshipper of Jehovah only. There was an idolatrous grove within the actual precincts of the temple at Jerusalem. There were idolatrous vessels, made for the worship of Baal, kept in the temple. The worship of Baal was carried on publicly all over the land of Judæa; the "high places," *i.e.* the summits of hills, were made use of for this purpose. Idolatrous incense * went up from Geba to Beersheba, and idolatrous priests were officiating publicly everywhere. The worship of Baal did not suffice to gratify the heathen inclinations of the people; the sun and moon and planets, and all the host of heaven, received worship also. They had their high places dedicated to them all over the land;

* Jer. xix. 4.

they had their altars in Jerusalem itself. We are told of "the altars that were on the top of the upper chamber of Ahaz," and "of the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the Lord's house;"* *i.e.* within the area of the temple itself. We are told of the "horses of the sun which stood at the entering in of the house of the Lord," and of "the chariots of the sun." But besides these two heathen worships there were others; and Chemosh, a Moabitish god, Milcom, the god of the Ammonites, and Ashtoreth, goddess of the Zidonians, had had from the time of Solomon high places devoted to them in front of the very walls of the holy city.† And besides these, the dark valley of Tophet, close to Jerusalem, was devoted to the cruel and abominable rites of Molech, another Ammonitish god. The rites of Molech were a species of fire worship, which was a common religion in the East, and was accompanied by actually burning men alive as an offering to the deity of fire. This was so regular a part of the religious ritual of Molech that some scholars have derived the word Tophet from a Hebrew word signifying drum, and have supposed that it was connected with the use of the drum to drown the cries of the victims of this dreadful superstition as they were being delivered over to the flames.‡ But however this may be, it is certain that the Israelites "made their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech;" *i.e.* that they offered them as burnt-offerings to Molech in this valley of Tophet. It is true Josiah, the good king of Judah, stopped these idolatries; and we read of other

* 2 Kings xx. 5. † 1 Kings xi. 7. ‡ Jer. xix. 6.

good kings doing the same. Hezekiah, for example, broke in pieces the serpent Nehushtan, and "removed high places, brake images, and cut down groves." * But so corrupted was the mind of the Jewish people that these false worships appear to have revived generally after any temporary cessation. In Jeremiah's day they "set up their abominations in the house of God," as we hear from the prophet. They had built the high places of Baal, which are in "the valley of the son of Hinnom;" † they "caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech;" ‡ they burned incense to the queen of heaven in the very streets of Jerusalem. So that if there had been any suppression of these heathen rites in the reign of king Josiah, they had all revived afterwards.

The Jews even who fled to Egypt to escape from the desolation of their country, when as a punishment for their idolatry it was given up to king Nebuchadnezzar, continued to practise heathen rites, so much were they under the fascination of them. They, even in Egypt, as Jeremiah tells us, "burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink-offerings unto her, and made her cakes to worship her." § Ezekiel tells us how, by one of the gates of Jerusalem, he saw "the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy;" ‖ that is, the image of Baal or Molech publicly worshipped; how, when he was filled with indignation at the sight, the Spirit said to him, "Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations" than these;

* 2 Kings xviii. 4. † Jer. xix. 6. ‡ Jer. xxxii. 34.
§ Jer. xliv. 19. ‖ Ezek. viii. 3.

and he turned, and beheld a door, and went in, "and beheld every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts; . . . and seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, with every man his censer in his hand, bowing down to these beasts, and a thick cloud of incense going up before them." He tells us how "the Spirit yet again said to him, Thou shalt see greater abominations than these; and he was then brought to the door of the gate of the Lord's house; and, behold, there sat there (on the very threshold of the holy temple of God) women weeping for Tammuz;" how the Spirit said then again to him, "Thou shalt see greater abominations than these," and brought him "into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, between the porch and the altar, were five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of God, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east."

So open and public, so regular and systematic, was the idolatry of the Jewish people. And were their vices less open than their idolatries? Not at all. They were practised in open day, boldly and without disguise. "Run ye to and fro," says Jeremiah, "through the streets of Jerusalem, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment."* And the great men were worse than the crowd; "they had altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds." "The bloody city, whose scum is therein, and whose scum is not gone out of it,"† is Ezekiel's description of Jerusalem. We are told that

* Jer. v. 1. † Ezek. xxiv. 6.

"her princes were like wolves ravening the prey;"* that they were "companions of thieves;" that "every one loved gifts, and followed after rewards;" that they despised justice and judgment; and that they made no secret of their vices, frauds, and oppressions, but rather exulted in them, and confessed them openly.

Now it may be asked, Why were the Jews so angry with Jeremiah for simply telling them the plain fact of what they did; and what they did not disguise? Why this unreasonable hatred of the man of God because he pointed to proceedings which were quite open, and which they did not deny? They had concealed nothing they did, neither their idolatries, to which they had given the most conspicuous sites—the tops of hills,—nor their vices, which were indulged in open day; why then were they bitter against Jeremiah because he simply saw what they flung into his face to see?

Now, in the first place, when bold, bad men do wicked things which they do not disguise, they do not thereby give the servants of God any permission at all to remind them of them, and make them sensible of the reproach. Often the more open and daring men are in wickedness the more they are offended at the least allusion to it on the part of others. They will thrust their misdeeds before other people's eyes; but they think their doing this is the very reason why they should not be thrust before their own; that the audacity and publicity even with which they have done these sins sets them above the judgment of others; and that they have proved, as it were, their right to sin

* Ezek. xxii. 27.

by the very openness with which they commit it. Ahab was perfectly open in his idolatrous wickedness, and yet because Elijah simply told him the fact, he said to him, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" These men treat sin as a matter that can be got rid of by simply imposing silence upon other people about it. They know that others know it; but so long as no comment reaches them they regard themselves as masters here, who can do what they like, and make the world subservient to them. And if they succeed in this, and force men to silence about their misdeeds, they are satisfied, and think that a sin of which they hear nothing, cannot, and will not, do them any harm.

This silence then is what pleases them. But let their sin come to their own ears, let a religious man speak of it to them, and let it even come round to them that religious men condemn it, and the sin presents itself in altogether a new light to them, and in an aspect which they cannot bear. They know they have been *judged*. This is the offence. They are taken down from the height on which they stand as men privileged to sin, and they find they have to answer for themselves. They are arraigned; they are put on a level with others. Then the feeling is forced upon them that they are responsible for sin, and this is a feeling which vexes and irritates them. They are humiliated in their own eyes by it. They resist it; but in vain. They cannot but acknowledge in their own hearts that there is One Who is superior to them, and Who can call them to account.

This, then, was one chief office which the old

prophets had to execute. They had to break down the pride of bold and open vice, when man thought himself privileged to sin, to do what he pleased, and to defy God. They had to bring down the haughtiness of man's heart, and make it feel the yoke. This class of bold, bad men, who think they have a privilege to sin, are not always the great men of the earth; they are to be found everywhere, in all ranks. They are sometimes to be found among the poorest and rudest, as well as the highest; but the most daring assumption of this privilege is perhaps found among the great, rich, and powerful of the earth; and it was these that the old prophets specially rebuked when they denounced this form of wickedness. The kings of Israel and Judah, who sinned with a high hand, and supposed that because they were kings they were above the law of God — those men in particular the old prophets reproved to their face, not fearing their power or their malice. We have an extraordinary instance of this sinning with a high hand in the chapter of Jeremiah we have just heard, where king Jehoiakim "cut the roll of the prophet Jeremiah with a penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth." But was the prophet silenced by this impious king's act? "Thou hast burned this roll," said Jeremiah; but he could not burn the prophetic words that came out of the mouth of the prophet. He had burned one roll, but he had to hear immediately another roll of prophecy, which said, "Thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of

David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost."*

But besides the great truth that no man was privileged to sin, there was another great truth the old prophets had to declare, and one opposed to as mischievous an error; viz., the truth that no sin was excused by its commonness. This is also a fatal delusion under which mankind lies, that numbers are a justification, and that when a great many do a thing it ceases to be a real sin, or a thing to be found much fault with. It is almost impossible to account for the openness and commonness of idolatry among the ancient Jews except upon this mistaken principle, which will indeed account for any amount of indifference and insensibility to particular offences. Idolatry was so common that it justified itself in their eyes. They thought nothing of it. Yet the very first commandment of the law said, "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me."

How hardened must men have become when they could fall down and worship Chemosh, and Ashtaroth, and Milcom, and Molech, and Baal, and the sun, moon, and stars, with this commandment before them, which they themselves formally recognized as God's commandment; still calling themselves the people of God, and owning professedly His covenant. What blindness is here! But the false worship had grown common; and what is common passes off as legitimate in the eyes of the great majority of men. The Jews had even united this false worship with the true, as if both were much

* Jer. xxxvi. 30.

the same thing; they had introduced idolatrous images, and vessels, and altars, within the precincts of the temple itself, as if they were all only different modes of worshipping the same God, and one mode were as good as another. The very idolatrous priests, who sacrificed in the high places to Baal and the host of heaven, we are told, "did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren;"* *i.e.* still considered themselves within the covenant, and reckoned themselves among God's people; for eating the unleavened bread before the feast of the Passover, was the formal acknowledgment of the Mosaic law. Thus it was that the pure and sacred truth had become mixed with heathenism, and that the Jewish faith had been contaminated. They saw no discord between the true God and idols, but worshipped both together. And so people see no discord or contrariety between the Christian belief and a worldly practice, simply because they are accustomed to both. A worldly life justifies itself in their eyes because it is common; they take it and the gospel together, and interpret the gospel accordingly. The old prophets were witnesses against this slavery of men to what is common and customary; they recalled them to the purity of truth, they reminded them of the holiness of God's law, and they put before them Almighty God as a jealous God, Who disdained to be half obeyed, and abhorred to be served in common with idols.

And all good and zealous Christians do now in a sense what the prophets did then. They witness to the

* 2 Kings xxiii. 9.

Christian belief, they represent the gospel law, they carry men back by their lives, and aims, and purposes, to the original holiness of the Christian standard, and they keep up the belief of their generation in Divine things. But for this indeed the faith would altogether die out, and the world sink back again into heathenism and darkness. But they are the salt of the earth, and they keep up, like the prophets of old, the light of Divine truth in the world. They are the light of the world.

*SERMON XXIII.*

# Isaiah's Estimate of Worldly Greatness.

"*Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice henceforth and for ever.*"—ISAIAH ix. 7.

WHEN Isaiah lived that part of the world in which Judah was geographically situated, that is to say the eastern world which was then the seat of civilization, exhibited certain grand, imposing, and ancient kingdoms. There was the kingdom of Syria, with Damascus for its capital; the kingdom of Assyria, with Nineveh for its capital; there was Tyre at the head of the merchandise of the world; there was Egypt, with its famous river, its rich soil, its dense people, its ancient monuments and records of powerful dynasties; and in the distance there was rising, and about to absorb most of these, the mighty empire of the Chaldee, with Babylon for its capital; that city which became the very type of the world and its glory, the great symbolical city which we never afterwards lose sight of in Scripture, but which accompanies us in vision and prophecy up to the end of the world and the consummation of all things.

How did Isaiah feel towards these kingdoms? and what was the place which they occupied in that scheme of things which he had in his mind by divine teaching and inspiration? The answer to this question is given in almost every page of his prophetical writings. He regarded them as mere passing, temporary governments, destined to vanish and give way to a glorious kingdom which was one day to appear, founded upon totally different principles from those upon which they were erected; a kingdom of peace under a Prince of peace, or the Messiah, Who was to collect all the nations of the earth round one centre, and bind them in bonds of harmony and love. This was the eternal kingdom of which they were the weak rivals. The tyranny, the pride, the injustice, the oppression, with which they were administered, only contrasted with the justice and purity of the everlasting kingdom, as dark shadows contrast with the luminous substance.

The prophet then saw them going to fall without the least regret, nay, even with exultation and joy; yet not, it may be observed, without a certain perception and appreciation of their extraordinary earthly grandeur, and of that loftiness with which they towered above everything then existing in the world. Whatever was to come, it was plain that these kingdoms were then the greatest erections that the world had seen, and the spectacle of pomp and power which they presented was such as to overwhelm and astonish mankind. The whole world was prostrate at their feet. Isaiah saw this; and it may be observed that he has a discriminating eye for human greatness. We see in his whole language and

imagery a discernment of the world's power, an insight into the greatness of its structures, and an appreciation of whatever stands out, attains pre-eminence, and emerges above the level of human things. The faculty of admiration, if we may say so, is strong in him. What wonder, what rapture pervades his writings! How is he penetrated with the majesty of nature, the height of heaven, the vastness of space, and the mystery of time! with the sadness and gloom of the present, and with the boundlessness of the future, with its hopes and prospects! How is he entranced in beholding the unrolling page of history, and the terrible force and irresistibleness of the order of events! Some minds do not appear to be capable of the feelings of surprise and astonishment; others have this faculty in a very high degree. It is evident that Isaiah had, and this natural quality may have been one among others which fitted him and marked him out for the office for which he was selected, and made him a suitable recipient of the gift of prophecy.

Isaiah, then, while he sees these great earthly kingdoms one after another perishing, and sees it with holy satisfaction, still does not see it without paying a certain tribute to their commanding position and their grandeur as fabrics of this world. "O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger;" who "saith, Are not my princes altogether kings? Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? . . . Wherefore . . . I will punish . . . the glory of his high looks . . . and under his glory shall kindle a burning."* The prophet

* Isaiah x.

sees and recognizes the greatness which he yet sentences and seals for destruction. And so when he turns from Nineveh to Babylon, he does justice to the earthly grandeur of that great power, in words which have become a proverb; and an established apostrophe throughout all time to fallen greatness. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the earth, which didst weaken the nations!" "Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee . . . it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us."* What language could describe more aptly and with more depth of emotion the fall of a great imperial power, of a kingdom of kingdoms, whose kings had other kings in subjection? And those, too, kings of ancient and memorable dynasties, conspicuous in the records of time, and whose grandeur was witnessed to by the solemn and costly fabrics of their sepulchres. "All the kings of the nations lie in glory, every one in his own house;" yet these, in the prophet's eyes, greet the Babylonian monarch on his entrance into the realms of death with the reproach of his humiliation in that he is made their equal. No description could express the dignity of ancient lines of kings better than this short, significant allusion to the pomp of the grave, to the famous monuments which immortalized in the East, and specially in Egypt, the names of the mighty dead; and no scene could illus-

* Isaiah xiv.

trate the greatness of the Babylonian monarch more vividly than the stir among these princes at his approach, to taunt him with the level of their own glory as being degradation to such a potentate as him. All this human greatness, then, Isaiah enters into; he even sympathises with it in so far as it arises out of the natural order of God's providence, so far as it has been ordered that man must be under rule, and that the rule must be conducted with imposing accompaniments, and leave tokens and memorials of its greatness behind it. So far the prophet feels with it; he only rejoices in the downfall of existing kingdoms when they have abused their power, and converted it to proud and impious purposes.

We must distinguish, however, between such appreciation of earthly rank and greatness as Isaiah shows, and another kind very different in spirit. The prophet Balaam had an extreme appreciation of earthly station and pomp, but he allowed himself to be carried away by the infection of it. He wanted to appropriate it, to get it for himself. He would, as far as his own choice was concerned, have degraded his own very gift of prophecy into an instrument of a monarch's power, for the sake of an alliance with a court and with the great of this world, which would have accrued to him. He was one of those instances of the rule how low people will often become in order that they may be high. It appears at first sight a contradiction that it should be so, because the honours of the world profess to be the rewards of what is truly honourable in conduct, and to be only the outward tokens of it. But we know that

the two can be separated, the sign and that which it ought to be the sign of; and man is eager to possess the symbol at the cost of the reality. He grasps at something tangible. He would rather have the sign without the thing, than the thing without the sign; for the thing is of the invisible world, and belongs to the inward conscience and the inward law; the sign is an article of the visible world with its conventional and market value. Balaam then sullied his prophetic character by a selfish and covetous wish to appropriate worldly rank and kingly power. He might even, as a prophet of God, and without reproach, have discerned the power of Moab and the dignity of its princes and its court. It was not contrary to the prophetic mind to do so; but he did more. He wanted to possess the favour of Moab as a gain and advancement to himself. Isaiah's, on the contrary, is a disinterested admiration of human greatness, without the wish to appropriate it in the shape of a worldly prize to himself. He looks at it from without, and is arrested by it as a spectator; but is not smitten with the contagion of it. The majestic soul of the prophet soars above cupidity, and does not mingle with the pride of earth; it casts off all alloy and contamination, while he apprehends keenly all that may be apprehended and admired without sin and consistently with inward purity.

I have been saying that Isaiah saw the approaching downfall of the great states and kingdoms of the world then existing, and also saw in vision, coming into their place, another, a larger and more universal kingdom, founded on completely different principles. The great

kingdoms then existing in the world were doubtless serviceable, under God's providence, in keeping up something like law and order amongst men. They were doubtless instruments of Providence for that purpose, and wielded the sword, of which the apostle speaks, for punishment of evil-doers; in a word, they maintained laws for the protection of life and property to a certain extent, and for coercing violence and punishing crime. But they did all this in the worst possible way in which it could be done, and only because even for their own selfish purposes it was necessary to do this. The whole system of government was a system of pride, injustice, and extortion, adapted to degrade the many and aggrandize the few. The multitude was ground down and reduced to slavery of mind and body; the few ran into the most extravagant excesses of pomp and luxury. It was a system contrived to flatter human vanity and ostentation to the uttermost, to stimulate the covetousness of man—his egotism, his conceit of himself, his disdain of everybody below him; and sometimes it attained a fearfully blasphemous and outrageous summit in the exaltation of one man into a god. When Nebuchadnezzar looked down upon his capital from the walls of his palace, and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" he virtually made himself god in his own eyes; and his subjects were content that he should be a god in their eyes as well, when all nations, peoples, and languages fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up, which was the image of

himself. It was then this inflated and infatuated pride, combined with worse oppression, rapacity, and injustice, and total indifference to the rights of the weak and defenceless (that is, to the great mass of human society), that Isaiah saw when he cast his eyes upon the great governments of the world of that day, upon the kingdoms of the East, to which he so constantly alludes; and with all this the kingdom of prophecy, that great future kingdom which forms the goal of prophetic vision, was to be in complete, marked, and utter contrast. And first the great Prince who was to be the head of this government is described: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of God shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."

And what are the characteristics of the government of this remarkable Personage? "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."* "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in Whom My soul delighteth. . . . He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench, till He bring forth judgment unto truth."† Such were the characteristics of the kingdom which was to be, such

* Isaiah xxxii. † Isaiah xlii. 1–3.

its justice, equity, its large and benevolent aim; and the capital of this new kingdom was to be "the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel," around which all the nations of the earth were to gather. "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee . . . . the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. . . . . Surely the isles shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified thee."* Upon reading such descriptions as these, of which Isaiah is full, we say, What a King! what a capital! what a kingdom! Could there be a greater contrast than that between the kingdom here seen in prophetic vision and the existing government of the world? Between the coarseness, the violence, the injustice, the ostentation of the kingdom of that day, Assyrian or Chaldee, with its boasting monarch, its proud, luxurious capital, its insolent and exacting nobles and officers,—treating the mass of the people as if they were made to be trampled upon,—and the order, serenity, and justice of the kingdom of peace? The bodies of the poor are provided for, and their rights respected. "With righteousness shall He judge the world, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." The monarch does not boast and trumpet forth his own praises. "My Servant, in Whom

* Isaiah lx. 3–9.

My soul delighteth; He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street." The officers of this new government do not use extortion: "I will make her officers peace, and her exactors righteousness." Law reigns supreme. "Violence shall be no more heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy border." But the question then is, What is this kingdom which is here foretold? Where are we to look for it? How and when will this prophecy be fulfilled?

Now to a certain and very limited extent we may allow that this prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled, and is fulfilled now. Under Christendom certainly a great change has taken place in the government of the world; a great change has taken place in human society. There is a justice, a public spirit, a consideration for the mass of the people which was not known under those old governments. This new state of things, then, is in a degree an answer to the prophecy of Isaiah. Could we indeed imagine that the prophet spoke only by the light of natural reason in this great prediction—that he saw that human nature was designed for better things than the low and corrupt state of society and civil government which existed in his day, and that he foretold in consequence a great change and reconstruction of civil society—could we imagine this, we should have a fulfilment of his prophecy in the new and existing state of things. And perhaps it is not contrary to reverence to suppose that there might be an element of this character in his prophecy; for because God gives an especial gift of prophecy, and a special grace of inspiration, He does not therefore exclude the prophet from

the exertion of his natural reason, and from that ground of prophecy that reason sometimes supplies, when great minds from their superior insight rise above their age, and see in new conditions of society a prospect which others do not see. Isaiah evidently looked with disgust upon the whole administration of the world as it was conducted in his day. The oppression, the injustice, which were the blots of all governments then, these are always before his eyes, and he draws the most vivid pictures of the degradation of society and of government. The prophet might in part then foresee, even upon natural grounds, and by a kind of prophetic reason, the rise of a better state of things in the world, because there were evident wants in human nature which pointed to their own satisfaction; and so far as this went, his prophecy would be accomplished already in the state of the existing world, and the fulfilment of it would now be going on before our eyes in actual facts. But it is evident that he has something more than this as the object of his prophetic vision, that he has the regeneration of the world before him, a second paradise, and a reign of peace and love, when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

Modern society then, with its justice, law, and respect for the rights of men, falls very far short of the prophecy. He sees in vision the world penetrated with the principle of love; but though we can show material results, more or less, this is not the motive which has generally produced them. Historically, has not this improvement in government been extorted by force, violence, and

strength of numbers, on the part of those who suffered from the bad government of the ruling class, instead of being voluntarily conceded out of Christian principles? With respect to Christian principles, is it not too true that while the few good have with a great effort raised the level, the rest of the world have only gained externally, and not in any real improvement of their own characters? Thus among the Jews, the prophets having been always striving to extirpate idolatry, at last idolatry, we may say, went out of itself, and when our Saviour came He found no idol worship, but the worship of one Supreme Spiritual Being in full possession of the nation. But were the Jews a spiritually-minded people on that account? We know they were not. In the same way modern society is a great improvement upon ancient; the public standard has risen, and yet the temper of mankind at large remains the same, and is not spiritualized or morally renewed. In what way then, and when, is this prophecy of Isaiah to be fulfilled? The Gospel tells us. Seven hundred years after Isaiah had uttered this prediction, there appeared upon earth a Personage who publicly took upon Himself the charge of its fulfilment, Who announced that He was that great and foreshadowed Person under Whom the world was to be restored, and a new and universal kingdom of peace and love founded. He stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth, "and there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath

sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes all of them that were in the synagogue were fastened upon Him. And He began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."* The prophecy of Isaiah, then, was not a dream to end in nothing, but it was taken up and was guaranteed again seven centuries after it was uttered, and Jesus Christ announced Himself as the Person who was to fulfil it. And the Gospel went forth to mankind with this call, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was the kingdom then which Isaiah foretold; but this kingdom is only really entered into in another world. The Church, which is called the kingdom of God upon earth, is only a foretaste and anticipation of it, not the reality. This prophecy of Isaiah, then, is only truly fulfilled in another state, which is indeed the goal of all prophecy. Here we have no abiding city, and the Jerusalem that we seek is above, which is the mother of us all. No prophecy of the regeneration of human society is fulfilled in this world. All prophets indeed have looked forward to a regeneration of the human race, and they have prophesied one after another, standing in their place and saying, "It will come, it will come." The day will come, they have all said, when this great communion and this universal empire will be set up, when all mankind will be one holy society,

* Luke iv. 17, 18.

bound together by love, under the Messiah and Prince of Peace. "The government shall be upon His shoulder," they have said. "The people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever." "And the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." This day will come, they said, and He will come Who will inaugurate it; but He came at the first time and He did not bring it with Him.

The first fulfilment was not a real fulfilment, it was only the anticipation of it. The Christian Church does but foreshadow the real communion and society of the prophet's vision. The kingdom of prophecy is still again postponed, this glorious kingdom still remains a vision and a vision only, and the finger of prophecy still points to something that is coming and coming, and still does not come. But the Gospel explains this. It tells us when and where this kingdom will be; that it will be in another world when this has passed away. Ages after ages are but a passing moment to the eye of God, and therefore though "the vision is yet for an appointed time, at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

*SERMON XXIV.*

# The Shortness of Life.

"*The days of man are but as grass: for he flourisheth as a flower of the field. For as soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone: and the place thereof shall know it no more.*"—PSALM ciii. 15, 16.

MAN'S reason is his distinctive privilege; but it has one melancholy result—it makes him know his own weakness and mortality. The brute creation does not know this. The other animals enjoy in the desert their untamed strength, or eat the herb of the field without a thought of the future, which they cannot even comprehend. Man alone is the prey to his own thoughts; sees danger coming, assailants approaching, suspects evil everywhere, starts at every sound, and turns everything he sees into an omen. Other creatures are only aware of evil when they actually come upon it, and after the moment of terror are tranquil and careless as before. Man has evil allotted to him, with all the aggravation of its prospect and approach—the long sustained and harassing pains of doubt and apprehension, fears going and returning. Other animals have only enemies of the passing moment to contend with; man has the sad advantage

of seeing the conflict beforehand, and so having to maintain a constant self-defence. His melancholy foresight creates a perpetual war, and he lives within a circle of enemies, and sustains his life as in a besieged city. He may be conscious of strength, but his enemies are strong too; and they are many, and he is one.

And this is more especially the effect of the gift of reason on the subject of death. On other points it only reveals to us our insecurity; here it reveals to us the end of our existence itself, as far as this world is concerned. Other animals, though they may at times appear to be influenced by vague fears, do not know that they shall die. Man does know it; this is the difference. He sees death beforehand, they do not. He knows what is awaiting him; he sees himself gradually approaching the point; he feels himself getting older every day. First youth passes, and is gone; then manhood. All the successive stages gradually close and wind up with their respective feelings and associations. He feels himself altering in mind and body year after year. Experience, settled opinions, fixed position in the world, all are signs of a life which grows and ripens, and is then to decay. He feels the process going on. It might be going on, and he not know it. But he does know it; he is conscious of it. No sooner is he born than he foresees his death; he is made a prophet in spite of himself. The soul which God has given him is a prophetic one. He has it; he cannot help it. Whether he would rather be without it or with it matters not. It is in him. It tells him that he shall die. This, I say, is a more melancholy

position with respect to death than if we did not know beforehand of its coming. It is sad to foresee. Prophecy is a lofty but a melancholy gift, and we are tempted at times to contrast ourselves unfavourably with those of God's creatures who are without this saddening foreknowledge. How boldly do they meet danger and assault! What confidence and indifference to consequences do they show! They are simply full of the sensation of their bodily power; are possessed and carried away by the low inspiration of their nature. They live, and they know not that they shall die. Their breath is given to them, their breath is taken away. God knows it; but they are unconscious. Man, though he may meet danger with courage, still does so with a sense of his own weakness, which he may resist, but cannot efface; for our nature's prophetic anticipation is a source of weakness. All nature else goes happily and unconsciously to its fate. Man alone has foreknowledge, and feels himself a sojourner in the world of which he is made the lord; and the first-born of creation is inclined half to envy the beasts of the field, and wish he could be as they. Such being the effect of the gift of reason on this subject, and such our particular privilege and trial, how do men meet it?

Now worldly men take one view of this, and say that such a looking forward and such a prophetical tone of mind with respect to death is not natural, because it leads to such results. And as a counterbalance to and remedy for such presages they take refuge in the matter-of-fact sensation of life which belongs to us. They say, "True, if a person chooses to look forward and trouble

himself he may; but why should he? He has these prophetical feelings indeed, but then he has others of quite a different class. He is a member of this present world, he is actually alive, he has motion, feeling, animation, all connected with this life. They have the prior claim upon him. Let him throw himself upon them; let them absorb him and swallow him up. He will then live entirely in the present, and will not be able to think of the future." Strange indeed it is, almost incredible did we not know it beforehand, that man should have the power of thus depriving himself of his foresight and sense of mortality. But so it is. There is a class of feelings connected with this life to which, if a man thoroughly commits himself, he will positively not be able to think really of himself as going to die; he will be simply a creature of present time, just as if he were a vegetable or an animal. Men may be very clever and very active-minded, full of vivacity and animation; but yet be exceedingly like the brutes in this one respect. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," can do this: it is a miserable power, but they have it. They can make a man their own. Forthwith his eye loses its keenness, its look into futurity; it only sees what is around it. The god of this world has blinded it. Man becomes an animal of this world; he rejoices in mere life, sensation, present motion and action. He lives in the present, as birds live in the air and fish in the water; he lives in this world; it is his element; his nature is accommodated to it. He has sold his proper birthright, and says, "Give me the world and I am content. Whether there

be another or not, this is mine. This is my life." Most dreadful state indeed for the soul to have arrived at, to become no longer that reasonable, prophetic soul which God made it, but an animal inspiration and a worldly instinct; an inhabitant, not of eternity, but of time. Nevertheless worldly men do throw themselves, as it were, deliberately and systematically upon this worldly instinct, in order to counterbalance the true prophetic nature of the soul, and prevent it from acting;—in order to deaden the sense of futurity, and annihilate the other world to their minds.

Now what is the Scripture way of dealing with the subject of death? It does not allow it to be thus put aside. Scripture brings out, strengthens, and consolidates our prophetic feeling with respect to it. It makes us view it with steady, calm eye, and keep it before us. It tells us that in the midst of life we are in death, and that this is to be our special view of life; that we are ever to think of it in that particular view, as ending or going to end. Do not we feel, as we read Scripture, how deeply, how thoroughly it meets the soul's wants and nature here? It does not flatter it with soft hopes indeed, and say, "Peace, peace;" but it enables it to look at things as they are; and nerves it. How real is Scripture's view of this life! Does not our heart whisper as we read?—Here is the simple truth, which the world keeps from us—we are born, and we shall die. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This is reality. Here we are safe, here is no deceit. This is honest warning; this is God's voice. Scripture bids us look on this plain state of the case; not divert our

eyes from it and raise up worldly images to beguile us; but to look straight at that which is and that which must be. This is true, all else is false. Scripture lifts us up out of the delusions of the present scene, and puts our real condition before us—what we are and whither we are going. It tells the soul to reckon beforehand, to foresee, to prepare; it lengthens its sight, it fixes its aim. It makes it feel time carrying us along, and all our life stretching toward an end; that is, it makes prophets and wise men of us. It is to be wise to know what our case is, and not to deceive ourselves.

But when God gave us this knowledge of death, it was not intended by Him that this knowledge should so occupy and fill us as to prevent us from taking our proper part in the action of life. He has enabled us to take an interest in the present, although we know that it will one day be over; and therefore we are right in doing so, while obeying the warnings of His word and our own nature against a blind confident assurance. Foresight was given us that we might be, not paralysed indeed, and rendered motionless, but sobered and chastened in the exercise of our active faculties; that we should feel that very check of which worldly men are impatient; for they would fain, while they do live, be going to live for ever in their own imagination.

On the other hand, there are persons alluded to in Scripture who appear to be always dwelling upon the shortness of life, but who draw from it anything but a moral and religious lesson. They imagine that the fact of life's shortness gives them the greater liberty to do what they like in it; they acknowledge the fact, but draw

from it the inference which suits their purpose. They show a perverse ingenuity in turning it to support the very notion which it is specially and pre-eminently designed to counteract; and they will even indulge in a false humility, and say that they are too weak and insignificant creatures to aspire to such high ends as are placed before them in the Gospel. They say that poor human nature, as the expression is, only makes itself contemptible by such aspirations. "What can be done," they ask, "in this short life of ours but enjoy the passing hour? Let us eat and drink then, for to-morrow we die. This life, whence produced we know not, and whither tending we know not, is such a dream that there is really nothing left for us to do but to dream it out, and see what comes of it." And perhaps they proceed to use the language of a false philosophy, and say that the soul is a mere breath and exhalation, or a subtle fluid, which runs its course and is gone.

As against those, then, who have no sense of the transiency of things, and those who have, but draw this conclusion from it; it must be said, first, that life is short; and secondly, that we are not vile or insignificant creatures, because it is so;—for this reason, that we have souls, which are designed to live after this life is over. We are in this world indeed for a short time, but it is in order to educate us for eternity. And this life, short as it is, is long enough for this purpose. Some it is true are taken early away, before indeed their trial commences; but of these we need not here speak. Those who remain, and are tried, have periods of time given them, varying in length as well as in the

strength of the trial contained in them, but all affording time and opportunity enough for the purpose of probation. Indeed when people talk of the shortness of life in the mode just now mentioned, as if it were too short for any serious work to be done in it, they forget first that a very short time is often enough to try a man. Many a man has in one day, nay, in one hour, formed a resolution which has altered his whole afterwards. Much may be done in a short time, if there is the will to do it. "For honourable age," it is said in the Book of Wisdom,* "is not that which standeth in length of time, nor is that measured by number of years: but wisdom is the grey hair unto a man, and an unspotted life is old age.... He being made perfect in a short time fulfilled a long time." And again, they forget that a life of even moderate length contains an amount of time which, considered relatively to this purpose, is large, although, compared with eternity, it is nothing. There are so many years in a moderately long life, and there are three hundred and sixty-five days in every year, and in every one of those days something may be done to improve the condition of the soul—some good act may be performed for the love of God and for the benefit of our brother; some effort may be made of a spiritual kind. And if these efforts are made daily and regularly they mount up in the long run, and produce a result. For a religious purpose, then, there is a great deal of time in a tolerably long life; and therefore, when we have to estimate the value of the human soul, what we must do is not to think of the extent of its stay in this world, but of its

* Book of Wisdom, chap. iv.

own nature, the end for which it is made, the eternal life which awaits it. We have opportunities enough if we use them; but if we let them go by, then indeed life is short; then indeed life does become a dream, and nothing more. We wake from time to time just for a moment to find that long stages of it are gone, and we sink back into sleep again. No wonder if persons who so use life talk of it as a mere dream to be enjoyed, and then to vanish away for ever. In itself indeed it is "a vapour that appeareth for a little while;" but as a preparation for eternity it is a serious state; it is of considerable duration; it has great means and resources in it. Let us cultivate, then, all those principles which ally us with another world, and so shall we grow more and more to be assured of our own immortality, and to feel that we are not made for this world. Conscience, justice, love, awe, what have all these to do with the simply material and visible world? They obviously do not belong to it; so far, then, as we make these our guides, so far we live a spiritual life, and may know that we are spiritual beings that will not perish with the death of the body. Let nature and all her visible empire fall away and disappear to the closing eye of death; this inner life does not depend upon it. The soul that is united to God will survive, and go on living in His presence. "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

These are thoughts to console and invigorate the Christian in all his struggles; and amid whatever intruding fears. Through the grace of Him "Who quicken-

eth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were," we turn our weakness into strength, our baseness into glory. A day will come when we shall need all the resources of faith to give us courage, and enable us to see through the grave and gate of death a resurrection to eternity. What will the anxious soul then give for some deep, comfortable, solid sense of its spiritual nature, and power to pass through that great change unhurt! How shall we then prize the smallest of those inward realizations of its own value, the evidences which a good life furnishes of its immortal nature, above all the prizes of life! What shall we give to be able to bring up out of the unfathomable depths one drop of living water as a pledge and foretaste of the future! How shall we wish that we had thought more of ourselves, and laid a deeper foundation within, and followed more the deep motions of the indwelling spirit! How forcibly will the value of the soul strike us as compared with the frail outside we have been attending to! We have different periods of life before us; some are just beginning life, some are in the middle, others are approaching the end; at whatever stage, let us leave off past neglect, and be wiser for the future. Let us begin, then, now to redeem the time, to be wise, to understand, to consider our latter end; for "now it is high time to awake out of sleep."

*SERMON XXV.*

# The Endless State of Being.

*"I go to prepare a place for you."*
JOHN xiv. 2.

THE most momentous question which any man can put to himself is, What will become of him when this short state of existence in which he finds himself at present is ended? Nothing can be clearer to reason than that the variations of lot which we see in this life—social distinctions, the degrees of wealth, honour, and fame, and even of intellectual power and knowledge—vanish into nothing compared with the importance of the question, Whether at a certain point of time, not very far from hence, we shall exist or not? The earth closes over all the emulations, the aspirations, the successes, the disappointments of man; and then where is he, and what is he? But if this question is settled, and if the profound conviction of our minds, which we cannot shake off, is that we shall continue to exist after this earthly scene has closed, then reason and imagination alike are absorbed in the contemplation of that boundless futurity into which we are so shortly to enter. Every thing that we can conceive or speculate about fades into common-place compared

with the astonishing idea of an endless state of being —of conscious, personal, reflecting being—which for ever looks forward to as much life as there has been, and infinitely more. This is an astonishing, an overpowering idea, an idea which it requires a strong effort to take in, and a still stronger one to repose upon with living belief; not on account of any opposition of reason (for reason, so far from objecting to it, is the very principle which leads us to it), but simply on account of that mechanical sense of incredibility which attaches to what is immeasurably and illimitably vast, and, *as such*, transcending our conception and comprehension—to that total unlikeness to all present experience, which is contained in endless existence; the release from all sense of transiency; the withdrawal of the weight and the pressure of mortality upon the heart; the removal of all anticipation of an end! It is easy to hold this belief in words, and to repeat the current expressions in which it is embodied; but it is hardly too much to say that the simple apprehension of the possibility of such a state of existence, as a real prospect before us—an actual life which we may at some time, under the Divine government of the universe, be admitted to lead—that a glimpse caught even of the mere chance of this as a fact, is superior to the mere verbal faith of a great many. There can be no doubt that chance, even bare chance, when vividly embraced and apprehended, is a very strong motive to action, often an overpowering one; and that it is not only strong, but lasting; that men will go on for years, and even for their whole lives, sustaining efforts and

carrying on plans, for the mere chance of some great prize. A keenly-discerned chance, if it is no more, becomes an overruling influence, not from its own strength, but from the force and liveliness with which it is embraced; it then heightens into a very focus of hope, when it is lighted up by all the converging wishes of the heart, and all the rays of intelligence and thought, which go to that one spot to kindle and illuminate it.

Undoubting assent to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, if it is only the result of custom, and goes no deeper than words, is totally powerless, and unable to control or affect a single action or aim in human life; whereas the mere chance of a happy eternity, if it is forcibly grasped as a real chance,—the mind truly perceiving that such a futurity is not out of the question, that it may be, that it is not a dream or fancy, a form of words, but a possible fact—this mere chance would have an enormous influence upon a man's whole life and conduct. An eternal existence in prospect converts the whole of this present state into a mere vestibule of the great court of life, a beginning, an introduction to what is to follow, the entrance into that immeasurable extent of being which is the true life of man. Our greatest efforts, schemes, and undertakings are but the petty currents which are carrying us into that infinite ocean in which all mortal existence merges, and are only important so far as they bear upon our conditions in this endless state. All here is but a beginning, an introduction. However deep the speculations of man, however boundless his projects, however

eager and impetuous his hopes, in an instant his career is cut asunder, and commences anew. Death is a fresh start for every one. The humblest peasant that tills the ground, the statesman that wields the destinies of a nation, are equalized at a stroke, and start afresh. If the statesman has stood his ground well against ignorant assertion, against interested clamour, and the malignity of faction, he will have the benefit of the part he has acted in that new start; if the peasant has repelled the coarse temptations of sensuality and bad company, he too will have the benefit of it; but both start afresh. Doubtless there exists in the celestial laboratory that searching crucible which can reduce the most different lives to one common standard of moral desert, and launch them thus transmuted into a fresh eternity, which will diminish to a mere point all the outward dissimilarities of the past. These considerations, when we are enabled to put them clearly before our minds, are indeed astonishing; and the imagination is overcome when it has really to take in the ends of things.

If the doctrine of a future life, again, is true, and man continues to exert himself personally after death —personally, I say, for what we mean by man's existence is personal existence; we have no other idea of it when we use the word—if this doctrine is true, another conclusion follows. For of what a world of spiritual beings does this doctrine reveal the existence now, at this moment—beings whose life in their own invisible sphere is going on parallel with our own in this visible one! If human beings live after death, all who have

ever lived upon earth are now in existence somewhere; where we know not, under what conditions we know not, but in a state of being somewhere. What an amazing disclosure is this, and what a vast conception it is for the human mind to entertain, that side by side with us, only separated from us by the veil of the flesh, is another universe of personal life, the dwelling-place of innumerable hosts once clothed with the same material body as ourselves, but now divested of it, and living under a form which we cannot at present comprehend! that we are upon the very confines of populated realms, from the sight of which we are barred, inhabited by real beings, who only differ from ourselves in having crossed the boundary of mortality! If we really believe that this is true, what miracle can equal it? It is an overpowering, an incredible conception—incredible were it not that reason itself necessitated, reason itself produced it. How immediately does it deprive this visible world of that totality which belongs to it upon the surface, and present it, stripped of its wall of circumvallation, as only one habitable spot in an infinite region of spiritual life.

Here is a truth then which specially tries the faith of this age, and people rise up on all sides of us who say, "Where is heaven? and what is this dream, with which you are taken up, of an endless life, and a state of glory after death?" Christians are bound then to give a reason for the hope that is in them; and they give their answers to the objections which these men raise. But what they say at the conclusion of every argument is, that no argument can have weight unless it is backed

by a proper state of the affections. Now here a question arises; for these men say, "No, we are not concerned with the affections here, but with the understanding only. It is the understanding which judges about truth. This is a matter of evidence, like a case in a court of justice; and to introduce the affections into the enquiry is to mislead the judgment, and carry it away from evidence to enlist it unlawfully on the side of mere wishes. What have the affections to do with deciding a question of reason?"

Now the great truth which we celebrate at this season* is peculiarly adapted for showing how much the affections have to do with a rational judgment upon religious questions. When we come to examine the evidence of the truth of a life eternal, we find that we cannot even approach a simply just estimate of it without the help of the affections. For what is the very first consideration that comes before us in this argument? Is it not the nature and qualifications of the human soul itself? We cannot possibly pretend to arrive at a conclusion here, or even to have gone into the very preliminaries of a judgment upon the question of the destination of man for a state of eternal happiness, unless we first have man himself before us. Is he a being who appears to us when we think upon his character (I speak of course, of some men, not of all), his qualities of mind, the kind of goodness he is capable of, and which he manifests now, at all worthy of such a destination, so that it can be spoken of with regard to him without any incongruity, and

* Easter.

that the unfitness would rather be on the other side, that such a being should perish? This is a question of human character. But we cannot possibly enter deeply into character without affections; we cannot estimate or comprehend truly, we cannot embrace keenly and with a living force, what is beautiful, profound, and touching in the mind and disposition of any person of extraordinary goodness whom we may have known or read of, unless there are affections in us which enable us to seize hold of their moral traits, and inspire us with a vivid admiration and appreciation of them.

Put before yourselves any one of your family or neighbourhood whose whole temper has impressed itself upon you as uncommon, and who has stood out from the mass of average characters as one of a higher mould. We have known of such bright examples, and perhaps the memory of some persons here may often rest upon some one who has now left the visible scene, but who did not when alive appear to belong to the level of this world; it was a type, a form, which arrested the eye, the manifestation of a higher life, and the embodiment of a spirit which was the peculiar gift of God, and came from above, from Him from Whom cometh every good and every perfect gift. Now, it is evident that such a character as this is an argument for immortality; it is a reason to your mind for expecting it, because the very idea of such a being as this perishing is a shock to us. Was this spiritual creation made in order to come to nothing? In the case of such an one, the whole of life has every look of being a mere preparatory stage of discipline. It

elicits and strengthens his character, consolidates the fluctuating materials of nature, matures his good tendencies, checks his wayward ones; he becomes wiser and better the nearer he approaches the hour of his departure from this world, a more perfect man, more answering to that design which is stamped upon his nature; the very final stage of all performs its part in this whole education of the man, and on the very verge of life he attains his highest growth—the soul is more than ever a living soul, its feelings most alive and quick, the heart most tender, thought most deep. Is all this for nothing? Is the structure with such pains built in order that it may be overthrown, and the parts so elaborately and delicately put together in order that one rude moment may shatter the work in pieces? Is the universe in which we live a system of treachery and of mockery, of means for no end, frustrating every hope, and baulking every purpose marked upon it? It is so if, just when the character is formed, the man is destroyed, and existence is at an end. That a good being should be extinguished, blotted utterly out of the tablet of the universe, and leave the place which he occupied a void for ever, this is a thought which communicates a shock to our whole nature; and that it does communicate such a shock is the strongest of all arguments against such an end of creation.

Here, then, in human character and the dispositions and qualities of the human soul, lies the first ground for a future state. It is the most important part of the whole premiss for it, and it weighs greatly, and must be taken into account as a mere matter of reason. But

can this premiss be apprehended properly without the affections? The moral affections are the very instruments by which we apprehend and enter into good and high human character. This fact is indeed quite a different fact, and therefore quite a different reason, according as we apprehend it, grasp it, and possess ourselves of it; and we do this in a totally different way when we do it with the affections, and without. Without the help of the affections we do not really understand it; it is a dull and hard fact to us. When the evidence we deal with is the human soul itself, a want of a proper state of the affections must interfere with the full force of the understanding as a judge of the evidence; because it is only by means of these that we can lay hold of a human character, and see the reasons which there are for its immortality. Here affection is part of insight, it is wanted for giving due acquaintance with the facts of the case. Feeling is necessary for comprehension; we cannot know what a particular instance of goodness is without it; we cannot embrace the true conception of goodness in general without it. Affection is itself a kind of intelligence then, and we cannot separate the feeling in our nature from the reason when we have to argue upon the characteristics of the soul, upon the grounds of all that in human character which appears to be above this world, the love, the self-sacrifice, the devotion, the simplicity, and singleness of motive of a good man. Are those then who assail the doctrines of religion sure that all is right within themselves in this respect? Is the state of the affections the first thing they look to in the argu-

ment? By their own confession, I might rather say boast, it is not. They say they do not want them for judging, and that they go by reason. But if they do not want them, it may be that what they do not want they do not have; and that not having right affections, their very understanding is not complete and entire without them; they have not even their reason whole. Had they more love to man, they would think better of his destination, and they would think better of it because they would apprehend more deeply what is in him, and would know more than they do about the human soul.

*SERMON XXVI.*

# The Witness of the Apostles.

"*Who His Own Self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by Whose stripes ye were healed.*"—1 PETER ii. 24.

IT is a remarkable circumstance that our Lord's divine character, and His character as Mediator Who made an atonement for the sins of the world, was attributed to Him by those who had known Him personally in the flesh, who had lived with Him, who had been His companions throughout His ministry. Had the divinity of our Lord and His supernatural offices been the interpretation of a later age, had people only when centuries had passed away begun to think of Him as having been God in the flesh, and as having been the Lamb of God that took away the sins of the world, it might have been said, "This is only an instance of the exaggerations of time, and of the difference it makes when a figure is seen through the mists of ages. Those who knew Him and lived with Him did not form this conception of Him." This might have been said; and we know that in false religions, where a supernatural character has been attributed to a particular person, the character has been the growth of human imagination a long time after the actual life of the person himself;

and that there is no evidence that those who knew him ever thought of such a thing. It is the offspring of ignorance and darkness. But in our Lord's case it was the very persons who knew Him, who lived with Him, and who accompanied Him in His life and labours, who attributed this unearthly character to Him. His divine nature, His office of Mediator, were believed in, allowing for a gradual growth, by those who were alive with Him upon the earth, and were witnesses to His every-day actions. It was those who had had Him familiarly before their eyes, who were intimate with Him, whom He calls His friends, who published this great mystery about Him to the world.

It is this, perhaps, that we most immediately think of when the apostles as a body come before us in their attendance upon our Lord in His earthly ministry. They were with Him, they saw Him always, they conversed with Him, they were familiar with His manner, demeanour, actions, and expressions; they noted His remarks, and how He took whatever happened to Him; they watched His whole behaviour; and yet they believed and embraced the truth about Him, that He was a Divine Being in the form of man.

How inexpressibly solemn is this idea—the idea that Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, and the rest, lived and were familiar with One Whom they came to know to be divine! Thus when we read that "the two disciples who heard John speak followed Jesus, and He turned and saw them following, and said unto them, What seek ye? And they said unto Him, Rabbi, where dwellest Thou? And He said unto them, Come and see. They came and

saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day"* —we know that that day, with its conversation and what it brought to their observation, introduced them to the beginning of their belief in His supernatural and divine character. Thus when Jesus found Philip, and said unto him, "Follow Me," and Philip afterwards found Nathanael, supposed by many to be the same with Bartholomew, and said unto him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the Prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph,"—we know that it was what Philip heard and saw in that interval that had produced this wonderful belief in Him. And this applies to the whole of the intercourse of the apostles with Christ during His ministry. So when St. Peter wrote, "Who His Own Self bare our sins in His Own Body on the tree, that we, being dead unto sins, should live unto righteousness"†—this was not the testimony of a person in a distant age, who never knew our Lord; St. Peter said this of One with Whom he had lived, Whose words he had noted, and with Whom he had been in daily intercourse and communion. And yet what a difficult, what a sharp and trying test this for such supernatural pretensions! To say of one Person that His death was an atonement for the sins of the world, that He bore them in His Own Body on the cross, was to assert a profound and awful mystery respecting Him, because it is saying that the whole world was saved by His death; but to say this of One Whom he had lived with and known—this is what we have no example of except in the testimony of the apostles to

* John i. 38, 39. † 1 Peter ii. 24.

Christ. People have in times past been ready enough to attribute, as has been said, a supernatural power and office to some one whom they never saw or knew, some one who lived ages ago, and whose form was seen through the obscurity and film of a traditional past; but to have known the person, and yet to believe that He was a supernatural Person, this was what took place in the foundation of Christianity alone. Actual knowledge and intercourse are searching ordeals. Can we imagine any one of mere mortal mould in whom such an ordeal would not reveal weaknesses and infirmities? Are there not proverbs about the result of familiarity with men? that they are great at a distance, but that when we come close to them their greatness vanishes, and they are reduced to ordinary dimensions?

This is not indeed always true; and there are and have been men who could bear the application of this strict test, who could be seen closely, and yet the greatness of their characters come out of the examination safe. But to no mortal man could this test of close acquaintance be applied without disclosing frailties and blemishes. And of such an one, whatever might be his goodness, it would be impossible for those who knew him, and had observed him, to say that he was a sacrifice for the sins of others; he requires forgiveness for himself. Yet St. Peter says of Christ, with Whom he had lived in daily intercourse, He "bare our sins in His Own Body on the tree." Wonderful and unexampled assertion, that He Whom he called the Sacrifice for human sin, the Reconciliation of the world, was no Person Whose name had come down to him from the

remoteness of time, but One Whom he had himself known. He had known Him, and yet he proclaimed this unutterable mystery about Him. "That which we have heard," says St. John, "which we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled of the Word of life: for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Had our Lord been mere man, do we not know what must have followed a constant near intercourse with Him? How could a claim to a supernatural spotlessness as the Lamb of God, had it not been real, have stood such an ordeal? It must have vanished with the light of day, and the constant scrutiny of watchful eyes. What is there equal to close acquaintance for dispelling false mystery? Yet it was those who had the closest connection with Christ who announced to the world the tremendous mystery which attached to Him, the mystery which, as St. Paul says, had been hid from ages and from generations; that He was the image of the invisible God, the First-born of every creature; that He was before all things, and that by Him all things consist; and that it pleased the Father by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether they be things in heaven or things in earth, having made peace through the blood of His Cross.

What a guarantee, then, is this to the transcendant

awfulness of Christ's character, that it was those who knew Him who announced His supernatural office to the world, who proclaimed Him Mediator between God and man, the immaculate Lamb of God, and sacrifice for sin! Was there not something unique and unparalleled in that conduct and example which came out as absolute perfection out of the ordeal of constant and familiar intercourse? But, it will be said, they were His friends, His followers, who thus testified to Him. True, they were; and, let me ask, do not friends and followers see faults and failings? Is it our experience of human nature; is it the general testimony to the ways and habits of friends, that their eyes are not open to the weaknesses and infirmities of those whom at the same time they love and honour? I do not think that any one who knows mankind will say this. The eyes of friends are able, like those of others, to detect the lurking frailty, the latent motive of vanity and desire for human praise, the infirmity of temper, the instability of purpose, all those hidden imperfections in the man which do not challenge observation, but which yet come out upon occasions. That those were friends and followers, then, upon whom Christ's example produced the effect of pure and unqualified awe, who contemplated it with a supreme religious wonder, undiminished by any exception or drawback in it, does not at all detract from the weight of this testimony, or the marvellousness of the impression and assurance which their whole converse with Christ left upon their minds, that they had been living in intercourse and communion with a perfect Being.

And were the Apostles men whose witness can be set aside upon any ground of weakness, want of judgment, and proper strength of mind? Were they men not to know the difference between a perfect character and an imperfect one, when they had it before them constantly? I think it may be said that it would be difficult to point out any set of men in history whose judgment—so far as we can gather from their conduct and writings—upon a life and character would be more solid and competent. Our Lord did not surround Himself, as human teachers and leaders sometimes do, with poor, weak men, wholly wanting in strength of mind and firmness of understanding, who merely act as flatterers of those to whom they attach themselves. We see in the formation of schools and parties here the superior mind collecting infirm ones about it, which act as insipid and soulless echoes of itself. But this was not what our Lord did. He gathered about Him the choicest specimens of the Jewish mind, strong and vigorous men, as their after-life showed, men of solid character and understanding, who were able when left to themselves to carry on the work which He had begun with power and firmness, with a wise policy as well as an ardent zeal; and who showed themselves able to cope with adversaries and the assailing forces of the world. They were fishermen indeed, or in other humble employments—unlearned men they are called—but is that any reason at all for imagining that they were feeble men in understanding, and wanting in mind? We see every day men rising out of the humbler classes of society who have not had opportunities of acquiring

the knowledge of books, but who yet show the keenest observation, the most vigorous capacity in dealing with men and things when circumstances call it forth. And so it was with the Apostles. Writers upon evidence have indeed sometimes—led by the wish to heighten the contrast between the Apostles in themselves, and as instruments of a supernatural Providence, and so to magnify the proof of the divine origin of that gospel which could succeed in spreading itself by such weak advocates—fallen into the mistake of under-estimating the gifts and the minds of the Apostles as men. But it is evident throughout the Bible that God does not choose feeble and inferior men for recipients of His inspiration, but that He takes sterling and strong minds as more adapted than others to the reception of His peculiar and rare gift. Thus what strong, natural character do the prophets show in their writings, which inspiration has spiritualized, but not extinguished! And so with the Apostles. Can we fail to see the force of their minds in their writings? What solidity of mind, what sobriety, prudence, gravity, tempering their zeal, they show in their epistles! With what command they rebuke! With what power they reveal and expose the sin and frailty of man! Take the epistle of St. James. How it pierces to the very core of the rich man's vice—covetousness and oppression of the poor! How it lays bare the treachery of the human heart in the instance of the double-minded man, and the man who is a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, who beholdeth himself in the mirror of God's word, and then goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of

man he was! And it was this company of men that surrounded Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. It was such men who saw in Christ the Man without sin, the undefiled Lamb of God, Who took away the sin of the world; the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. It was the purpose of God to give us that special guarantee to the supernatural holiness of Christ which was contained in the testimony of such men, who had known Him, and lived with Him, and yet felt this assurance about Him, to show us that the belief in the mystery about Him had gone through that most trying of all ordeals—familarity with Him.

The Apostles are the witnesses to our Lord's miracles, and especially to that great miracle of all—the resurrection. But they are also the great witnesses to that other fact which is so strong a part of Christian evidence—the character of Christ. They were His companions, they saw His every-day life, and yet this familiarity did not interfere with His being a supernatural Person in their eyes. Habit and custom did not take the edge off their awe and wonder at Him; did not weaken their impressions or dull their perceptions. They saw with ever fresh admiration and astonishment the image of the invisible God; they proclaimed that manifestation of the divine glory to the world, and they gave up their lives in confessing to and asserting that marvellous fact. It is this testimony which constitutes them "the glorious company of the Apostles."

*SERMON XXVII.*

# Life a Probation.

*"That I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no."*—EXODUS xvi. 4.

THERE can be nothing more sobering than the truth, that this life is a state of trial and preparation for another. We use these words indeed, but hardly take in their meaning while we use them. For how can we pronounce a more important decision respecting this life, than that it is simply an introduction to another life; that its importance is a relative one, not for what it contains in itself, but for its reference to an existence beyond it. There is at the same time something wonderfully satisfying in this idea. It puts life before us in a point of view which satisfactorily explains it. We desire to know respecting everything, what it is for. A serious person, as soon as life as a whole is placed before him, must say to himself, "What is this life for? what is its object? what is its end?" When he asks these questions then, and he is told that this life is a state of probation, out of which it is intended that he shall come fitted for another life which is to last for ever, that seems to him a satisfactory account of this life, it is a reason sufficient to explain it.

Let us only put before ourselves some of those ideas

of life, and what life is for, which have hold, practically at least, of worldly men, and we must see how utterly unsatisfactory they are as mere accounts of life; that they do not approve themselves to common understanding. To one man life is a mere pursuit of riches; if he feels himself growing richer and richer every year, he appears to be doing something for himself which is very important, which is worth living for; and this is the account which he virtually gives to himself of life. His growth in wealth seems to him a sufficient end of life, just as the growth of a tree is a sufficient end of a tree living. He feels himself magnified to himself more and more every day; this satisfies him in a way. But in the very midst of this increase and enlargement, or just when the struggle has been surmounted, and the day of enjoyment has come, life terminates. What a stopping short there is here! what a breaking off! Can this really be the end which life is for? It does not approve itself as such to the simplest person. Or take honour and greatness as the end of life, and there is the same breaking off. In the middle of the race, or just when the obstacles in his way have been surmounted, and he stands on the eminence to which he has aspired, he is taken away from the world for ever. "Where will ye leave your glory?"* says Isaiah to the princes of the earth. So it may be said to every one who has aimed at and who has got worldly honour. He has to leave it, to leave it just when it reached its height, just when it is most precious to him. If he has a name, that may stay some while upon the earth; but

* Isa. x. 3.

he, where is he? He has gone and left this world for ever, and with this world he has left everything which this world has of his, his name among the rest. He is for ever separated from it. His name in this world exists, but it is no more a possession of his; he does not enjoy it, his pulse does not beat, or his heart throb with the celebrity of it. There is an eternal disconnection between him and his earthly name. Or does the end of life, as it appears to a mere man of pleasure, satisfy our understanding any more? He is more open and undisguised on this subject than either of the other two I have named. He says at once, "There is no end for life, it is a vapour which appeareth for a little time, and vanisheth away; but while it lasts I will enjoy myself." This is the abundant possessor's account of life in the parable: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

After going over these different ends of life, as they are practically laid down by men, which are so poor and trifling, how does the understanding repose with the satisfaction which anything true and solid imparts, upon the account of life as a state of trial with relation to another world. This does appear a sufficient reason why we have life. This satisfies us; this accounts for the fact. Other views of life, which obviously fall short of the serious truth, we cannot entertain as reasonable views.

To apply then this account of the end of life practically, how much does it simplify matters in our journey

through life. There is something in the different objects which start up in a man's course through this world which is distracting. So many things appear of importance—one advantage and another advantage; they invite us to pursue them, and we are very apt to pursue them as if they were all in themselves of consummate consequence to us. Our attention is turned into a number of side directions, by-paths, turnings off which lead nowhere, and which are in their own nature baulks and mere stoppings short. But the principle of trial as the end of life at once shoves aside all this multiplicity of irrelevant ends to make a way for the true one; it reduces the purpose of life to the greatest possible simplicity—reduces it, as we may say, to a unit—to the effect upon the individual himself, what he does, and how he turns out under these circumstances. The apparent outward ends are only important as tests of him; they constitute his ordeal, whether they tempt him to a blind pursuit of them, or whether he resists their mastery, and does not allow them to command him. The outward advantages, or disadvantages, of life, are the materials and the instruments of a great trial, which the Almighty conducts for the manifestation and proof of the individual; that is the end. The manifold exhibition of apparent ends, which constitute and compose this world, is but the machinery for the production of this one real end. The idea of probation thus gives a singular unity to the whole design and plan of life. It throws the individual upon himself as the rationale of the whole.

This principle of the end of life being probative,

then, applies mainly to all the ordinary external advantages of life, and our pursuit of them; but it also affects another and less ordinary class of human objects—the objects connected with the good of others, those useful and benevolent works, and those public religious works, which good men propose to themselves. Religious men have much at heart the spiritual and temporal benefit of others; and it is a natural and proper consequence of this to set up undertakings and form plans for the improvement of the minds and bodies of their fellow-creatures. But there is one defect to which good men are liable in connection with their attempts to do good; they become too much absorbed in the success of their own plans. They ought indeed to wish that works which have the good of others for their object should succeed. So far they are in the right; but they are apt to exceed this natural and legitimate desire for a good issue of their attempts, and to convert it into an anxious self-interest. They set their hearts upon a particular scheme answering, and if from any causes which are quite out of their power it fails, they are put out of temper, are angry or despond, as if they themselves were injured. Now we see that under these circumstances the important truth for such men to realize, and the truth that would correct this disorder and establish again the balance of their minds, is this very principle we are here speaking of; viz., that of the end of life being trial. If they brought this truth home to themselves, they would see that the only important thing to them was, not that a useful undertaking should answer, but that

they should have done faithfully the best for that purpose; that their own charity was the only part of the business which would have a real result to themselves, and that that was the same whether their plan succeeded or failed. When God put the idea of the undertaking in their minds, that suggestion was His trial of them, whether they would take it up or pass it by. Have they then sincerely followed it up? If so, He looks only to the heart, and to the will of the person who undertakes a work, and not to the result. Do what you can, and leave events to God. If good and religious men then remembered and applied the principle of trial in such a case, they would not be inordinately solicitous about success; they would not be disturbed, or complain fretfully, or be indignant at failure. They would feel that, in their own willing action, the end of the whole transaction was, as far as they were concerned, answered and accomplished; that there had been no failure; that a trial had worked its end, and a good and beneficial and a victorious end to them, if they had stood it.

It will be said, however, "Must not you be grieved if good attempts fail? Have you a right to make yourself and your own moral benefit the sole consideration?" I reply, Do exactly what is right in either case. Grieve for the loss to others, and be glad for your own good conscience before God. You can do both. But when your disappointment at the failure of your plan makes you neglect the other source of gladness in yourself, do not indulge the delusion that it is from any generosity of motive that you do so. On the contrary, it is be-

cause there was too much of self in your undertaking that its failure is all that you think about, omitting the benefit of the trial. Your motive has not been quite pure; you have aimed at the pride of success. It is for this reason that failure depresses you so much; and that you do not see the practical satisfaction that is to be gained from it on the other ground.

There is indeed a danger of persons who have very active and busy, ardent and zealous minds, assuming not only that a particular work is given them to do, but—what is an unauthorised addition—that they are sent into the world to achieve this particular work, and that that is the reason why life is given them. The common task of mankind as a body seems to be assumed as already accomplished in those who have the higher and grander calling of some special work. In describing this tendency in the idea of special callings or missions to interfere with the idea of trial and probation as the end of life, I am stating rather an unconscious view than a view men put to themselves in words, or even definitely in thought. It has, however, much practical hold upon some, causing them, in the bustle of the larger and more public field of work, and in the eager contemplation of particular objects, to lose sight of the general design of life as a trial and probation.

Now it is not to be denied that persons have life conferred upon them for the good of others as well as for their own, inasmuch as the whole human race is one family, the several members of which are bound to do each other good. Nor is it to be denied that over and above this general mission of love which belongs to

all men, some may be charged with particular and more conspicuous services to mankind—with distinct undertakings for the good of the Church and society. But it must be remembered that if this is the case, such special calls are a part at the same time of personal trial; more than this, it must be noted that they come under and in subordination to personal trial, as the main head of Divine design, in relation to the individual. His personal trial is the only object of life which is concerned with his own individual eternal interests. If therefore men set about special undertakings, and pursue them in such a spirit as that the peculiar and special mission practically supersedes in their own thoughts the general end of probation, it is evident that they transpose the order of the Divine design, which makes the personal end of life the spiritual and the superior end. There is all the difference as regards themselves in the two. The one is by so much the more important and serious and grave end to them, by how much a purpose which they have to accomplish on their own behalf and for their own eternal interests, is more important than a purpose which they have to execute as instruments for the benefit of others. The general end of trial and probation concerns them individually, and upon its issue they depend for their own salvation. The special objects and undertakings only affect them individually, and serve to this end so far as they are included under the general purpose of life, *i.e.* so far as they fulfil their own trial and probation in doing the best to promote them. So long as they do this, the issue itself of these special callings is a totally irrelevant

one to them, and does not concern them in the remotest way. Yet how often do we see men anxious and eager for the irrelevant issue, as if it was all in all to them, labouring with the most vehement zeal for the success of those particular works and plans which constitute in their own idea their special call, and all the time hardly giving a serious thought to the general conduct of life as the period of individual probation! They are intent upon the outward object; they neglect themselves. One would say that for the attainment of these special objects, the issue of which only concerns others, they in a sense sacrifice themselves. They sacrifice themselves not rightly, but wrongly. They do not make a sacrifice of that part of themselves the sacrifice of which is acceptable to God; they do not sacrifice their pride, their worldly hopes, the good esteem of men; but they sacrifice what they have no right to sacrifice, their own spiritual discipline and progress for the sake of these outward ends. Is it so uncommon to see men in the stimulating pursuit of even good public ends—good in themselves—growing proud, arrogant, self-opinionated, vain-glorious, contemptuous to others, heedless of the rights of others, even sometimes too successful proficients in the arts and craft of the world? What is this but, while they are professedly eager for the good of others, to neglect their own?

I have said that in these special undertakings and missions God makes use of us as instruments. His Providence works by means of us as His instruments, and undoubtedly it enters within the scope even of our personal trial, acting well as such instruments. Still,

if we view those capacities in which we act a part, it must be seen that what we do as instruments is a far inferior work to that which we do to fulfil our own personal trial. As God's instruments we only occupy a place which even the worldly and the unbelieving may take. God often uses the wicked as His tools for accomplishing His ends. We are not united to God simply by being used by Him as means; this is an office which belongs to good and bad alike. But in fulfilling the purpose of life as a sphere of trial and probation, we are God's servants in a different sense from that in which His instruments are; we are His servants by personal obedience, and by the agreement of our wills to His will. We must not elevate, then, what a man does as an instrument to accomplish a special end of Providence, above what he does as a being passing his trial. The one work may cover a larger space in the eyes of the world than the other, but it is not necessarily a spiritual and good work in the person who does it. The divine object may be answered, and the instrument who is used to accomplish it may be condemned, condemned even for the very spirit which he has shown while acting as such an instrument. The general end of life, as trial, is superior to all special ends; and it is thus superior because the general end is also the individual end. It is the end which concerns the individual being, his spiritual condition, his ultimate prospects. It contains the highest and grandest ends to him, the only ends that are of any moment to him; it contains an eternal end—the reward of life everlasting.

*SERMON XXVIII.*

# Christian Mysteries the Common Heritage.

*"Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me."*—MATTHEW xviii. 5.

THE great mystery of this day* looks at first sight rather difficult to combine with the special subject upon which I have to speak to you this morning, I mean that of your school-children; and yet there is one very obvious common tie that binds them together. For when we speak of mysteries, are not we all children? Are we not all children alike in the sight of that universal Being, Whose mysterious nature and incomprehensible attributes we celebrate to-day? Here we see as through a glass darkly; here we know in part only. Upon this subject the deepest philosopher is but a child, and he is wise if he only thinks himself one; and therefore it is that we treat these high mysteries at all as themes for a congregation comprehending educated and uneducated, rich and poor. All are alike upon this ground; we all stand on the same level, and therefore it is that we all recite the Athanasian Creed together. The Athanasian Creed is

* Preached on Trinity Sunday.

a hymn of praise to God on the ground of His incomprehensibility. His incomprehensibility itself is a source of praise, because whatever we cannot understand in Him is, by the very teaching of natural religion, itself an excellence in Him—a height, a glory. His incomprehensibility and His glory are the same. It is thus that the Creed is suited for a congregation and for worship. Some persons think it is only adapted for theological discussion among learned men and divines; but this is not to see what the Creed is, and its necessary character. It is wholly to omit a deep part of the mind of man to assume, as some do, that this Creed cannot touch the heart in any sense, or stir a single sentiment of the religious mind. If it is the very suggestion of natural religion, upon the thought of the incomprehensibility of God, to praise Him for it, to glorify Him for that boundlessness and infinity which distinguishes Him as God, then certainly this Creed is in its very nature a hymn of praise as celebrating that great attribute of God. There is a powerful devotional force in it. It appeals throughout to, and stirs up the idea of, the infinity of the Divine Nature, the profundity, the awfulness of the abyss it is, the solemnity of such vastness. This is the secret of that march of statements, and its effect upon the mind. Every one statement in that solemn procession speaks; it gives an utterance as it passes, and that word is—Infinity. Each in order and in turn joins in, saying, "God is infinite, a mystery of mysteries inconceivable. His infinity a mystery; His personality a mystery." The burden of the hymn is the union of

His infinity with His personality, that as infinite He has three persons, and that as the one God He is but One.

The Athanasian Creed is thus a hymn of adoration to God upon the ground of the wonderful mystery of His Being. It is a hymn to fulfil a special claim and religious want of the mind. We ordinarily praise God for His benefits to us; but it also appertains to the principle of worship, and it is a part of the needs of the human soul that it praise Him for His nature, His infinity, His mysteriousness. This is an express theme of praise, which is accompanied by its strong feelings, and sacred joy. Man has a sense of holy pleasure in these supernatural ideas, these fragmentary thoughts, and these shadows of the divine falling upon him. A certain stir of religious feeling, is, then, the natural accompaniment of the Creed, and it suits the place of, and is in its proper character as, a hymn. Let it not be thought that the Christian crowd cannot enter into the subject, and that it is only fit for theological scholars. That is altogether a mistake. The whole Christian body can receive fully the deep impress of its majestic ideas. They belong to the multitude, those ideas of mystery, of infinity; they are the heritage of the mass; they are for all, and not for the theologian only. Here men are all on equal ground. The incomprehensibility of God is the idea of human nature. It harmonizes with the vault of heaven, with the boundlessness of space, with the whole spectacle of nature. Every time it strikes the simplest intelligence it makes its impression, and excites the mind to religious im-

pulses through that sympathy with the marvellous and stupendous which is part of our religious reason.

And here we approach a common ground rising up in the mystery of this day, and in the special claim of the children of the poor, the consideration of which is also assigned to this day. Those who are acquainted with the poor know the extraordinary inequality of their minds, according as we measure them by a standard of education and information, or by a standard either of moral feeling or of religious ideas. The difference which education—taking the term in its conventional sense as meaning that which makes an educated man—the difference which education makes in its own sphere between one man and another is immense and incalculable. The absence of it cuts off community of thought on whole worlds of subjects, and makes a barrier between two persons which in the earthly sphere of thought is insuperable; it makes the approaches to each other so narrow and bounded. Such a vast difference does education make between two persons for talking to each other, communicating with each other, interchanging information, and so on, that they are like two different beings.

But as there is the sphere in which conventional education is everything, so there is a sphere in which conventional education is nothing. The poor have two grounds upon which they are on a perfect level with the rich and well-informed; they have the ground of moral feelings, and they have the ground of religious truths. Thus with respect to feelings, let sorrow befall them, with what truth and genuineness of expression

will they give vent to the sense of bereavement; nay with what dignity sometimes and simple loftiness of language; with what aptness and force! Here in the realm of the natural feelings of the human heart they stand on a par with the foremost of the world's society. And again in the sense of the relationship they stand in to God, in the feeling of awe, of worship, of dependence upon their Maker, and of the sense of His Majesty, Greatness, and Immeasurableness, in all this foundation of religious instinct in the soul, they are on a level with the best-educated of society. There is no sense of a Divine Power in the world which a scholar, a learned man, an accomplished man, a man of letters, may have, which a poor and, as we say, uneducated man may not have in as full force. Nay, as has been said, all those mysterious ideas of the Divine Infinity and Incomprehensibility which are expressed in the Athanasian Creed, belong to them exactly in the same way that they belong to the deepest scholar. He has no advantage here. The poor man has these mysterious ideas in his mind as much as he has; they are part of the human soul. Talk to the poorest man about God, and he knows that He is a universal Being, that He pervades all space, that He is incomprehensible; and yet, on the other hand, that there is a sense in which we know Him, and that He is in us, and speaks to us through His Spirit—all this mystery of not knowing God, and yet knowing Him—has just as much a place in the understanding of a poor man as it has in the man of highest intellect; He has inherited all these sublime ideas. St. Paul addressed to the philosophers of Athens

that profound speech respecting God which we read in the Acts of the Apostles: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being."* This account of the Supreme Being was given to a circle of acute and subtle philosophers, but the poorest man among us can understand it. It is not at all above him; his capacity is equal to it, because it belongs to that part of him which is equal to the foremost, to the most important and deepest part of him, his religious ideas and instincts implanted in him by God. His understanding here is the same as that of the most intellectual man.

And now to go nearer to the subject of the education of the poor. If there are these two great fields of mind and understanding, in which they stand on or nearly on a level with their earthly superiors, what does this suggest with respect to the particular scope and object of the education of the poor, and the special end to which it should be directed? Does it not immediately indicate that this is the quarter to which our endeavours should be addressed; that their religious ideas

* Acts xvii. 24–28.

and their moral feelings should form the subject of training and culture? I would say to those who argue for a mere secular education for the poor, What can you do better for them, even looking at it as education merely, than bring out in the poor their strongest point, that which can receive a thorough development, that part of their mind and understanding which admits of the fullest and most thorough culture? Even in the way of education, what do you gain if you pass over this really deep part of their minds, to instil into them knowledge of an ordinary secular kind, in which the great mass of them never can make much way, and never can take a place that shall not provoke a most unfavourable comparison with their superiors? The poor never can acquire in any large degree that conventional education which is called education, and which is said to make an educated man in society. It is not in his lot in life to do it. His lot is one of bodily labour, and bodily labour does not give the leisure to acquire the large stock of information, and that whole growth of intellectual habits which constitute conventional education. What, then, do you make him, by applying this technical superficial training to him, but a poor imitation of his superiors in the world's favour, having caught some fragments of a stock of knowledge which is only real training and culture when possessed in some way as a whole? What do you do but exhibit him, and draw attention to him, specially on his weak ground? Whereas if you cultivate his moral feeling and his religious thought, you place him on that standing ground on which he is on a level with his outward

superiors; you bring out those deep parts of his understanding which really raise most both rich and poor, which constitute the highest understanding of both. In the way in which Scripture describes the knowledge of God, the sense of His presence, the fear of His judgments, the desire to please Him, the thought of His Omnipotence, of His Infinity; does it assume men to be capable of this knowledge, without mind, without true understanding? By no means. It is always put before us as being itself wisdom and understanding, as in that capacity elevating every one who has it, elevating him as a rational being, giving him rank in the scale of God's intelligent creatures. Thus in the book of Proverbs the word which is applied to all this collective religious sense of things is wisdom. Wisdom, knowledge, understanding, all those words which denote the intelligent part of our nature are used to express this perception of divine things, this sense of God's power and majesty, this acknowledgment of His law. "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." "I, Wisdom, lead in the way of righteousness, and in the midst of the paths of judgment." In what lofty language does Scripture show forth the dignity of that part of the human understanding which consists in the perception of religious truth, and which the poor can have in as much perfection as the highly-educated.

And now let us place ourselves in the schoolroom itself, and who can doubt that the very children themselves have gradually growing in their souls this divine

spiritual faculty, whereby they perceive in their own way and degree the things of God? Do they not know that there is a Power above them Whom they cannot see, but to Whom they pay an instinctive worship? Do they not embrace the idea of a world unseen? Have they not a sense of sin, whereby they know that they have done, and that they do daily, what they know to be wrong? And do they not understand that they want a Saviour to procure forgiveness for them? All this they enter into, and they understand according to their measure.

And truly is it not an admirable and merciful arrangement in our nature, as God has created it, that our minds should have the power of understanding the same things in different degrees, the same truths, the same thoughts, the same books? A wise man understands them; but a simple man does also in his measure. A grown-up man understands them; but also a child understands them in a degree;—can go a certain way into their meaning. And with respect to the great truths of Scripture, and children's power of understanding them, we may observe that it is so ordained in the course of Providence—and it is a circumstance which tends to facilitate in childish minds the acquaintance with gospel truths, and accommodate it to their understandings—that forgiveness is a prominent subject of the childish age. They have to ask forgiveness of their parents for what they have done amiss. And they ask it with tears; and when they receive it, it makes a strong impression on them for the moment. They know with the light of their tender

years, and in accordance to the earthly source from which they have derived their sense of it, that pardon is peace. They rejoice in the sense of forgiveness, of being reconciled and accepted by one from whom their own fault, something wrong they had committed, had estranged them. And does not all this serve for a shadow to them of a higher forgiveness? When they come across those deep truths in Scripture, that the "Son of man is come to save that which is lost," that "the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world," that "Christ came into the world to save sinners," they can see the meaning of such announcement in some degree and measure by the aid of that figure which their own experience has presented to them. They even feel that there is a Being higher than father or mother, Who has been offended, and Who can forgive. Thus the liveliness with which their childish age brings home, in the natural course of its history, the idea of forgiveness to them enables them to take in, in an incipient way, gospel truth. They know what peace is, and what eternity is.

And indeed can we enter a schoolroom without the thought coming across us, How much is there in childhood which is adapted to receive the lessons of Christ, and that very fundamental message which He came to deliver to a fallen world? A child can embrace the idea of one person dying for another, and see in dim but true shape the great truth of the Atonement; it is not alien to his mind and the sympathetic nature which God has implanted in childhood. The doctrine is indeed in remarkable keeping with this sympathetic

nature, by which children feel for others, and so understand the spirit of self-sacrifice in persons substituting themselves for others out of generosity and kindness, which is a sort of natural figure and shadow of the great Atonement. The Holy Spirit has promised to work in the minds of children as in those of grown-up persons: they are indeed sometimes very peculiar receptacles of grace, and are moulded even in their immaturity into striking patterns of the spiritual mind and temper. They are acutely sensitive often to whatever they do wrong, and cannot rest till it has been effaced from the minds of others, and they can feel that they are restored again to the same place in their affections they held before. What a foundation then we have in the childish mind for the fabric of the Christian character! The gospel is built upon this sense of sin in our nature, and the longing for forgiveness. What a treasure have we then in this early character, in this tender and soft ground into which to cast the spiritual seed before the heart has been hardened and corrupted by pride and evil inoculation! It is a melancholy thought indeed how different it will be with many who now look so promising. But, alas! the evil seed is there; we know it, and we must not hide it from ourselves. It has its sad fruit to bear as well as the spiritual seed. But let not us be wanting in our duty. Let us do all we can to bring up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; to instruct them in the will of God, the love of Christ, and the influence of the Spirit. Let us save them, so far as outward help and guardianship can do,

from the evil within them, and keep them members of Christ's flock. How completely indeed are the children of God described in Scripture as representing the character of childhood duly developed, and with mature strength, steadiness, and constancy, added to the quick sense of sin, the strong wish for pardon! Here is the root existing amid the passions, frailty, and selfishness of nature. Let us try to elicit it by training and discipline, calling down the aid of the Holy Spirit to assist us in the work, and to bless our instructions. He can impart to the natural gifts and graces of childhood that spiritual form and substance which alone can prevent them from either running wild into unstable feeling, or evaporating in a mere dream, as soon as the trial of life begins.

*SERMON XXIX.*

# Our Lord's Hour.

*"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."*—JOHN ii. 4.

THIS reply of our Lord to His mother is at first perplexing; and yet when we meditate on it in connection with the context, we see a deep and remarkable meaning in it. His mother had just intimated to Him that she wished something to be done by Him, and this would appear to have been to supply wine for the company at the marriage feast—a new supply by miraculous means; for no other means would there seem to have been. The remark of His mother, "They have no wine," appears to imply that their resources had come to an end—that there neither was any wine left, nor any ordinary means of procuring it. It was thus an appeal for some extraordinary channel of supply. She who knew her Son's supernatural birth, she to whom the angel had said, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that holy Thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," she knew that that Son was the Son of God in the form of man. Yet He had been thirty years in the world and had as yet done no miracle; He had not even begun to manifest

His glory, to show what He was, that He was not a mere man. She therefore says to Him, as it were, in the emergency which had arisen, "Begin now; this is a proper opportunity for commencing the revelation of yourself and your high nature—your supernatural rank and power. Do now a miraculous act."

Doubtless the virgin mother was not without those feelings of sacred rejoicing in the greatness of her Son which belonged of right to her. When in human life mothers have great sons, we say, without implying any stain or fault in the word, that they are proud of their sons. We cannot use such an expression properly of the virgin mother; and yet she had some feeling corresponding to the pride of the natural mother in a son, a great son; though different, and much higher, and tempered and purified by the awful mystery. We cannot doubt that she was full of sublime expectations, of a confident hope of great things going to take place in connection with her Son, and by His power; that she had before her a great end for which He came, and which He was to accomplish; and that she knew that signs and wonders were the appointed mode by which He was to reveal Himself and His mission to the world. She had therefore the glory of her Son before her eyes as the object of her desire; and now that He had attained, after a life of retirement passed unknown to the world, a full age, she wished to see the commencement of His glory. This miracle in Cana is expressly connected by the evangelist himself with the glory of our Lord, and connected with it in the special way of being the first emergence of it—the first rising of the

sun upon the horizon—the first gleam of that light, the full brightness of which afterwards filled the earth. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory."

It was to this appeal, inspired apparently by this motive, that our Lord replied, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." The expression "Mine hour" has always in St. John's gospel a peculiar significance, and carries with it an allusion and tacit regard to the last and final hour. Thus we read, "They sought to take Him: but no man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come;"* that is, it was not yet the appointed time when He should be delivered up into the hands of men, to work their pleasure upon Him. On a like occasion, namely, when He had been preaching, and setting forth with a power which raised the jealousy of His enemies, the greatness of His mission, the same expression is repeated, "These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as He taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on Him; for His hour had not yet come."† It occurs again later in His ministry; that is, subsequently to the great act of the whole people going forth to meet Him with palm branches, and crying, "Hosanna, blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord;" when the Pharisees were more than ever alarmed at the spread of His influence, and said among themselves, "Perceive ye how we prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after Him." It was after this that some heathen proselytes who had come to visit Jeru-

* John vii. 30. † John viii. 20.

salem, being struck with what they heard of Him, introduced themselves to one of the Apostles for the purpose of being brought to see Him, and speak to Him. "And there were certain Greeks among them that came to worship at the feast: the same came therefore to Philip, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus. And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."* And He adds, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour."†

Here then we see throughout a double significance and allusion in the expression, "Mine hour." It is connected with His death, and it is connected with His glory. The hour in which the Son is glorified is also the hour when He finishes His course in this world. It is when the corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies that it bringeth forth much fruit. It is the very hour of His glory, at the thought of which His soul is troubled, and of which He says, "Father, save Me from this hour." But the connection between His glory and His death is not confined to the very mortal hour itself. His glory is, from the first moment that it begins in the world, an anticipation of His death, an omen, if we may call it so, of it. It is the note of warning, of preparation, which our Lord hears speaking in a way

* John xii. 20–24. † John xii. 27.

clearer than words, speaking even with the certainty, as it were, of a voice from heaven, and telling Him that the end draws nigh. Whatever from the first brings Him before the world, draws attention to Him, impresses everybody with the idea of His power, and of the greatness of His character, the penetrating mystery of His doctrine;—every miracle wrought by Him, every sign of His commission from heaven, all His acts of beneficence and love, all that makes the crowd gaze with wonder upon Him, supplicate Him, fall down at His feet and worship Him;—all this but heralds and ushers in, but quickens the approach of the final hour. It does so upon very plain and natural principles. Every revelation of His power necessarily increases the fear and jealousy of His enemies, and the increase of their bitterness and hatred necessarily brings on all the sooner the last act of their vengeance. The spectacle even of His goodness is gall and wormwood to them; and to see the officers awestruck at Him, and the multitude following Him, was a blow to their own pride and self-complacency which they could not forgive. Moreover, with the manifestation of His own power His doctrine spread too. His preaching grew more and more formidable, and the scribes and Pharisees trembled for the continuance, not only of their own credit with the people, but of the people's belief in what they taught them. His death therefore must become the more necessary in their eyes in proportion as His glory becomes the greater. It is a history of which the principles and motives of the bad actors in it have often been acted out in other cases,

though never in a case in which they had such a victim and such results; in which the Victim was the Son of God, and the result the salvation of the world.

Whenever eminently holy men have appeared in the world, who have felt themselves called to resist its wickedness and falsehood, and to introduce a better faith or a purer life, the devil has stirred up the opposition of the powerful to them; and according as the active zeal of the servants of God has become conspicuous, has kindled their own hearts and those of others, has stimulated the eloquence and other gifts which God has given them, and so elevated them in men's eyes, and made them talked about, and produced fruits of conversion, that is, in proportion as their glory has grown, the desire of the wicked to rid the world of their presence has increased; and it has depended on the character of the times whether they could put this wish into execution or not. Thus the glory of the good has only been the forerunner of earthly loss and grief to them, and often of bonds and death.

Our Lord therefore saw in all His greatness upon earth a prophecy of His death. In every successive gleam of His glory here He saw another stage of His course run, and the Cross another stage nearer.

This is evidently His meaning, for example, when the Greek proselytes who had come from a distance asked to see Him. This was one of those signs which showed how much His word had made way, and what a deep response it had struck in the human heart; strangers, foreigners, men who were proselytes indeed to Judaism, but who lived far away and belonged to another nation,

coming to Him, brought to Him by Andrew and Philip; as Simon Peter had on the opening of His ministry been brought by the same Andrew, and as Nathanael had been brought by the same Philip. This was the introduction by these Apostles of a brother and a neighbour to Him, but the Greeks were strangers to the Apostles. Their awe and their curiosity reflected the wonderful power of His public preaching; they were first-fruits of a larger harvest, samples of a conversion of the world which was to spring ultimately out of His ministry and death. He instantly sees the peculiar significance of such a fact; but first of all He sees that particular sign and augury which, as such an addition to His glory, it gives of His own death. He does not wait, He immediately says, "The hour is come. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."* He does not look away from the, humanly speaking, sad accompaniments of His glory; He accepts, He closes in with the condition, He embraces that condition as the fountain of the world's conversion and salvation. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." After saying this His soul was troubled; He felt, for He had perfect human nature, the transient dread of nature's dissolution. He said, "Father, save me from this hour." But a voice from heaven strengthened Him; He resumed His previous attitude of strength and victory towards death; He reaffirmed the triumphant fruits of His death, "Now is the judgment of

* John xii. 25.

this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out."* It was the exulting voice of the Prophet sounding again from His mouth, "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction;" from His mouth Who was about to fulfil the prophecy, for He adds, "and I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." So rich a harvest would the seed when fallen into the ground produce: all nations gathering round the Cross, looking on Him Who was nailed to it, and drawing thence life and immortality.

Such was the meaning which lay underneath His reply to His mother: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." What have I to do with thee? This was a gentle form, not so much of rebuke, for He fulfilled her wish in working the miracle, as of warning. The phrase implies a certain resistance to a demand in itself, or to something in the way of urging it. In this case the resistance was not to the request itself, but to a certain spirit, or rather to a certain want of perception, foresight, and far-sightedness in which it was made. He saw that His blessed Mother, in her sacred exultation in her Son, and her desire, so full of faith, to see the commencement of His glory and His glorious ministry, did not sufficiently embrace the humanly sad accompaniment and condition of the fulfilment of her desire; namely, that when this life of visible glory once began, it would very soon reach its close. "Thou askest Me," the reply would seem to mean, "to work this miracle, and to inaugurate My ministry; thou desirest to see My glory here beginning;

* John xii. 31.

and thou knowest not entirely that when My glory begins, My death will soon follow. Thou lookest only to the holy joy of such a sight, and knowest not that in what thou askest lies hid the very sword which will at not a distant period pierce through thine heart." The reply of the supernatural Son to the Mother was in spirit a prophecy of His own early death. "Mine hour," He says, "is not yet come." Not yet come; His life hitherto had been passed in holy obscurity; He had been unknown to the world; He had done no act to reveal His own great mind and power, His own divine mission and nature; and therefore as He had done nothing to arouse hatred and jealousy, He had done nothing to hasten the hour of vindictive triumph, when His enemies would put Him to death. But from the moment that He began to manifest Himself to the world that hour would have come; that is, it would begin rapidly to draw on. He fulfilled her request then, but His reply was a check upon the spirit which had suggested it; not a rebuke to it, but a memento to accompany it. He joins to His first manifestation of His glory a prophecy of sorrow. The holy Mother did not, nor indeed could she, penetrate into the future; she could not see behind the veil which hides the earthly issue of our hopes from us. We are nowhere told that she had the gift of foreknowledge. She could not tell that His life would be a short one. She might perhaps have in her mind a long vista of years of sacred power and success. She might in that sense be looking forward to long years of happiness; not of course of an earthly prosperity, but still of happiness, a sacred hap-

piness upon earth, such as results when religious aims and wishes succeed, when those we wish to live and carry out their work do so; when they live to see more and more of the extent of their influence and the effects of it; when the reward of love and self-denying exertion comes in the shape of the good and holy living to see the fruits of their own labours. She did not know but that the Son of God might live out the years of the life of man, to bless the earth by His presence. It was true a sword was to go through her own heart, but what this signified was not yet disclosed to her, and she might think that when the grief came her very consolation under it would be His presence. She could not know what the real event would be, and therefore He breaks the sad tidings to her, and by a hint, and mere allusion to His hour, intimates obliquely what He does not say directly. He signifies that there is a connection between this miracle and that hour, and that the very act which first introduces Him in His power and greatness to the world, is also a step to His final departure from it.

We have, then, in these disclosures of our Lord, in these instances of the manner in which He regarded the several stages of His own earthly glory, the attitude of His own mind towards human glory; for even He as man arrived at glory. He arrived at an earthly and human glory; He became the object of a whole people's thought and wonder, about Whom the admiration and awe of holy men, the fear and hatred of the powerful, the interest and curiosity of the whole nation gathered; He was followed by the multitude, sought out secretly by rulers and rich men;

crowds listened to Him daily in the temple, and went away, saying, "Never man spake like this man." Even the terror of the Pharisees was part of His glory; even His judgment and condemnation were a tribute to His supernatural power and greatness.

These instances, then, reveal to us the mode in which our Lord felt towards human glory. He was perfect man—man in all those affections of the mind which are not in themselves sinful. He had therefore a sensibility to human esteem and honour, so far as that feeling is legitimate, and is the property of human nature, and not only of fallen human nature. His remark even, that a prophet was "not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house,"* showed a sensibility to the denial of honour to Him from them from whom it was due. But His perception of His own earthly glory had not the nature of enjoyment in it. It was far from this kind of satisfaction. The enjoyment of repose on human honour and esteem belongs to those whose thoughts do not go out of this world, and who regard this life virtually as a permanent state, having so long as they do live all the sensation of living for ever here. Such men can enjoy and rest thoroughly in human honour, as if it were the most solid possession. It would be derogatory to the very nature of our Lord to suppose such interest in the esteem of men possible to Him; but we learn in these expressions what He does feel with regard to this demonstration toward Him; that He is sensitive to the fact of such a recognition of His greatness

* Matt. xiii. 57.

by the world, but does not rest with any enjoyment upon it. It has one, and only one, association in His eyes; it reminds Him of the extreme shortness of His earthly life—that but little of it is left, and that He must make the most of what remains. "I must work the work of Him that sent Me while it is day."

And as the tide of human glory rises higher and rolls in greater volume, every advance of it is only another memento of His death drawing nearer and nearer. Not indeed that any feeling that we can call regret at the shortness of life can be assigned to our Lord; or that when He said to His mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come," He expresses in that reply any sorrow for Himself. The ancient poet indeed makes his hero express this sorrow to his mother in view of a short life,* and his words are beautiful and fitting in the mouth of mortal man. Even a holy prophet might express it; he might apply to himself the words in which the writer in the Apocrypha sublimely describes true wisdom chastening, though not wholly subduing, grief at the early death of the righteous: "He pleased God, and was beloved of Him; so that living among sinners, he was translated; yea, speedily was he taken away . . . . for he being made perfect in a short time fulfilled a long time"—words which though exulting in hope still carry on an undertone of sadness. But though the essence of such a feeling might enter even into perfect humanity, the mystery of the incarnation forbids that even pardonable human weakness or frailty should mingle with it. Still

* *Iliad*, book xviii.

less would it allow of a sense of loss in an early departure from an earthly glory reflected from vanishing and disappearing human minds. The world is a succession of generations; each of them passes like a flight of birds through the air with cries and piercing utterances, saying, "This man is great; that man is wonderful." One flight with its ejaculations is not over when another follows—to be lost itself as quickly; vanishing into darkness on the opposite edge of the horizon. The prophet then could address the great kings of the earth on their departure from the world, and say, "Where will ye leave your glory?" Our Lord's seat of glory was not in this scene of mutability, but in the eternal world, where all that is abides, and is not subject to decay. He left His glory only to return to it; and even while on earth He spoke of Himself as the Son of man Who is in heaven.

And is there not in our Lord's reply to His mother a general lesson, and one of wide application? Frail man sets his heart on earthly honour, on station, credit, name, and forgets that even if he is successful, these rewards are, when they come, signs of mortality. They come but too generally, if they come at all, when much of life is past, when strength begins to diminish, and the journey gives tokens of drawing to a close. He longs for them beforehand; and when they are gained, they come with sad auguries and grave mementos. A cloud rests upon the goal when won, and a melancholy mingles with the satisfaction of success. Let him reflect upon this aspect of human glory, and draw a sobering and chastening conclusion.

*SERMON XXX.*

# Fear.

"*And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*"—1 PETER i. 17.

WE collect from the language of the New Testament that fear formed a greater part of the state of mind in which the first disciples of Christ lived than it does now. Persons are described as being in a permanent and habitual state of mind which is called fear. It is not of course that state of disturbance and agitation which we are placed in by a sudden danger, not excitement and alarm. Still it is fear, and it has the natural and true characteristics of fear. It keeps people in earnest, that they should be in the right way, apprehensive lest they should fail. They are solicitous about their own salvation—do not regard it as a matter of course. They always have it in their minds that they are going they do not know where; and while on the one hand they have firm hopes resting on God's promises, they still do not think of an unknown world and another life without fear.

Thus fear is recognized as an express characteristic of Christians, as in the text: "Pass the time of your

sojourning here in fear;" and just afterward, "Give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."* "I was with you in weakness, and in fear,"† says St. Paul to the Corinthians. "Behold, what fear," he says again, "was wrought in you."‡ In the Acts we hear that the people walked "in the fear of the Lord." "They were filled with fear," we hear from St. Luke. It was the precept of our Lord: "Fear Him Who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." And through the epistle to the Hebrews the strain runs, "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."§

It must appear indeed when we examine it, that this fear is part of the very life of Christians, and that we cannot have even our understanding quick and vigorous without it: it is part of our very understanding. Are there any truths which we profess to own about death, judgment, and the world to come? It is impossible but that these truths must beget some fear in us if they are really seen, for they concern ourselves. So when we read the account of the early Christians in the Acts we see that a state of fear is natural to them; it was part of their very religion, and they could no more conceive religion without fear than without faith of any kind. It is not only the jailor at Philippi who springs in trembling, and says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" it is the whole body of Christians that lives in an atmosphere of fear; and they feel fear simply because as Christians they are alive and not dead. Their minds

* 1 Pet. iii. 15. † 1 Cor. ii. 3. ‡ 2 Cor. vii. 11. § Heb. xii. 28.

are quick to receive impressions. Are they in matter of fact surrounded by a spiritual world of beings of whose state they do not know the particulars? and do they of a certainty expect to enter into that world some day? and are they upon their trial here to determine their condition there—what it is to be? To say that they fear in the presence of these facts is simply to say that they see things as they are, that they are not insensible to all that stirs thought and awakens the concern of man. We do indeed see people without fear; we must confess it is the most common state in which we see them. To be without fear is the rule. Fear seems an exception, and to most an unnatural exception. But if we acknowledge the belief of the Christian, can we possibly avoid coupling fear with it? Is it more than a mere sound without it? Fear is the very mode through which we express the fact that we do believe: it is our perception of things being real. It is simple stupidity, it is being without ideas, to be without it. Persons may have quick parts; eyes and speech may be quick and ready, but their souls are dull, they are without the quickening faculty, if they are without fear.

What solemn facts do we profess to believe in!—a world of beings passing from one silence into another, growing up out of nothing before our eyes, and returning to nothing, as far as the senses inform us; but our belief being that out of this world they pass into another, as real and full of life as this; and into punishment or happiness according as their life has been. What dread then must hang over the

curtain of the future if we only see it is before our eyes! How can we not fear with such a veil of mystery—reaching to and affecting our very inmost selves—before us? To be without fear, I say again, is to be stupid. It is not to understand our own situation; not to see where we are, and what is coming. Fear is what gives outline, and depth, and magnitude to these impressions; it converts the unseen world into a real world. We know it is more than a world of our fancy; our fears fix it upon us, and make it a true world to us.

And here we see the great difference which presents itself between the religion of the Christians of the Bible and our religion, when we come to compare the two. We see that in the Christians of the Bible fear is a great motive, but that it is not a dejecting influence, rather that it is an active, stimulating principle, pushing them even to exertion for others; — that it is a strengthening and fortifying feeling. The whole powerful missionary spirit of the early Christians was conceived in fear. In fear the Apostles preached, and in fear their preaching was heard; in fear men converted, and in fear they were converted. The sins of the world, their dreadful nature; the blackness of darkness, in which lost mankind was sinking, made the Apostle tremble: he saw with such vividness the gulf which was ready to receive mankind. He preached the gospel in anxious haste to rescue any of these lost souls; he was in fear lest he should miss any soul within his reach; as though throwing a momentous chance away. The whole undertaking to convert the world was —

though adopted in seriousness, in a practical spirit carried on, and with persevering activity—in its very principle one of fear. It was built upon that foundation. The impulse that gave it life and momentum sprang from that. It would not have been the active thing—it would not have been the thing it was—without fear as its great stimulus. The Apostles were answerable for every breath they drew, every pulse that beat in them; all must go to further the gospel. The earth was covered by a pall, and death was at its core, unless by any means they could get access for some breath of the glad tidings to give it life. It was a dreadful state; and this state of things went to every corner of their hearts; they lived in an atmosphere of fear for men—missionary fear, anxiety to rescue a brand from the fire.

But fear was in fact all the time their simply seeing what sin was, what judgment was, what hell was, and what heaven was. It was a supremely critical state, and they were upon the edge of a great rescue or a great fall. They could not indeed understand a man without fear. How could he be a man, a rational being? And certainly to be without all fear is, when we look at it, to be dull, and to be without the acumen of our reason, as I have said. People try to get rid of fear, religious fear; but what can such an attempt end in, but in their total delivery to frivolities; and to acuteness about trifles, at the expense of a complete stupor and failure of intelligence about everything great and awful, everything grand and weighty in the world. Nothing that is great is real to them. To this state

men reduce themselves by rejecting fear; because fear is the great quickener, the great giver of sight to the eyes and hearing to the ears, the discloser of the spiritual world.

In the Christians of the Bible then we see, as I have said, habitual fear; and this fear, far from depressing them, is rather a stimulus to their faith; and by giving strength to their faith it confirms a happy experience of the effects of the gospel upon them. With fear operating in them, they felt that they could not doubt. Fear planted them beyond weak hesitation, and gave them solid realities to think of; they felt within the atmosphere of fear the sobering and chastising influence of matter-of-fact truth. Their faith was not the child of volatile joy, or of mere lively impressions, but was chastised at its beginning by the severer feelings, and gained solid firmness with its chastisement. The faith of the early Christians was largely indebted to their fear for its rootedness and firmness. Fear planted it in their souls, and established it as a natural product of the soil, whereas under mere joy and hope it would have flourished prosperously for a season as an exotic, but its strength would have been a delusive one. An habitual faith which will last, must be a faith which is founded on fear; founded upon the natural impression which the facts of the invisible world make upon us. A comforting faith which has the power of sustaining us under adversity is only attained in this connection; and this was specially the faith of the Christians of the Bible. Fear then did not in their case produce dejection or sadness; but fear gave them a firm standing ground,

upon which arose the consolations of faith and hope. How comfortable do all those passages sound which talk of the fear of the holy servants of God, of their living in this fear, and of their spirits being subdued into resignation to His will. It is when awe and the dread of God's power and greatness have properly told upon the human mind that the believing heart emerges out of this vain and uncertain life:—that faith shows its steadfastness. We might suppose beforehand that fear would be attended by horror; but the fact is, that to be able to fear is one of the fundamental privileges and, at the bottom, comforts of the Christian life. While you fear you believe; that at any rate is one effect. Fear is thus sustaining. While you fear God you believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. This is ever the accompaniment of fear in Scripture, and the great compensation; it settles, it tranquillizes, it gives peace, and it breeds ultimately security and calm, and a reasonable assurance. All those quiet settled views of the Divine government which fix and strengthen its hold upon the mind, and make it the great anchorage it is, from which to be unmoored is to lose everything, arise from fear, from seeing the awfulness of facts as they are, and of this whole world as it is around us.

Let none then attempt to put away fear from their minds as a principle of their lives, because they have found it sometimes depressing, sometimes a check upon a high flow of spirits. To the old it gives the security of a true basis of religion; to the young it gives this and more, it gives the feeling for all that is grand and

deep in religion. It gives all the vivacity, the sense of wonder, the sense of awe, which is connected with religion, and which is attached to this world in its connection with religion. Without fear to produce a true impression, religion is lowered into a small thing; its magnitude depends upon our own minds, and how they are capable of being impressed, and in what aspect they are capable of viewing religion; and this is fundamentally a matter of fear. With fear goes all the mystery and depth of religion; it is lost, and in its place appears mere dry routine, the outward dress and show of religion; fashion, and opinion, what is temporary, evanescent, and talked about. All that is really beautiful and solemn about religion, its present and its future, is nourished amidst thoughts and impressions of fear. Without these impressions religion becomes utterly arid and prosaic, feeble and unable to affect the mind: with them it becomes powerful, and able to engender the strongest feelings, and to strike home and impress the heart. Not only the whole inner sense of religion goes with fear, but with this inner sense goes all that is vivid and that has power on the intellect—there is left a dry sense of religion, as something that must be done and got over.

Let us take care that we are not brought to this state; that we keep our understandings quick and alive, our thoughts keen and sensitive to the magnitude of those prospects which religion opens out to us; and to do this we must have fear.

*SERMON XXXI.*

# The Educating Power of Strong Impressions.

"*Because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*"—ST. MATTHEW xi. 25.

THE rude and simple character of the Apostles and first disciples of our Lord has been urged too prominently and without sufficient qualification by some writers of evidence; as if it was a part of the proof of the Divine mission of our Lord, that it prevailed without the human advantages of learning and worldly gifts: that therefore such an element in the evidence could not be pressed too strongly. But after all it is part of the evidence for Christianity that it takes with able men, and does not only influence the simple and uneducated. How then is the question settled by others? They say, with greater truth, The Apostles were not men wholly without gifts of intellect, and without power; nor, again, did they display superior gifts of understanding to begin with; but rather this is to be looked upon as a change which was worked, a rise in the level of their minds, an expansion, an

enlargement which took place after our Lord had left them. This holy season* is especially consecrated to the thought of this extraordinary growth in the apostolic mind, when, thrown back upon itself, or rather, transferred from a visible instructor to an invisible One, from our Lord in the flesh to the Holy Spirit, it attained that sudden height of wisdom and energy which struck such surprise into the Jews and their rulers.

It is indeed to be noted that one and the same kind of mind, and that a high mind, is capable of passing through two very different states with regard to the measure of independence and power of action which it may show; the difference being that in one state a man may be so much under the influence of an extraordinary and superior being that it may prevent him, for the time, from finding out his own powers. He is so entirely subject to the moulding power of this remarkable person with whom he has been providentially brought into relation, that all the faculties of his mind are yielded up to him, to be trained, and directed, and sealed with his impress. He places himself in the relation of a perfect obedience;—into an infantine faith. Is there anything in this at all opposed to a high and vigorous mind? On the contrary, if you are to have any new and original fountain ever opened in the heart of man, and in the life of the world, it must be in this way. Persons must give themselves up to some fresh teaching; they must see a real superior to themselves in some one who can implant this seed in their minds,

* Whitsuntide.

and impart a new direction to their thoughts, wishes, and aspirations. They must be engrafted on a fresh stock. But this is a state of mind which will produce a double effect. First, it will lay a kind of infantine basis in the character; for minds cannot imbibe their whole ideas from another, an instructor who penetrates all their thoughts, and gets at the depths of their nature, without being inoculated in the very act with a certain childlike character. The man is passive, and is perpetually being impressed as a child is. Here, then, is one side of the character, which lasts so long as it is needed for the gradual formation and development of qualities which may appear at first sight contrary to it; viz., power, strength, an ability to impress others, the character of an able man. If a new fountain of life has sprung up in the world, a man must drink it in thoroughly, take in the teaching devotedly, before he can be strong himself from it. Otherwise he will extract no power of character out of it. All this time he appears only a child; yet he is collecting the maturity and vigour of a man. It is only the common truth, and a very familiar truth of education.

The character of the child is wanted as the provisionary state, favourable for getting from the superior mind all that it can give. It does this all the better for its own passiveness and child-like properties; it takes in all the more intensely a living fund of thought from a master, which ultimately turns to the disciple's own strength, and his advantage as a man of power. What he needs for this is an extraordinary capacity of impress; but an extraordinary capacity of impress from

a superior makes a child for the time in tone and character.

The truth is, one kind of childhood is that of pure weakness; it cannot be impressed by anything whatever, serious or powerful. But there is a kind of childhood that can be impressed by what is powerful, and this childhood has a strength and capacity of its own. It is not a man's power, but it is power in its own sphere. It can be carried away, be wrapped up in an impression; can dwell on it, feed on it. This is a true kind of strength. For put a child in this sense into relations with a superior—I mean a really superior being—and he will suck a hundred times more of the living force of that being's character, of the truth of his nature, of the originality of his thought, than what you call a man in the ordinary sense will. A man of an ordinary type can piece things together and furnish himself with knowledge, by collecting from the rostrum here, the porch there; but if a new light appears in the moral heavens, a mind can only take that in that has the power of being impressed. The man must not scatter his strength, or disturb the unity of his attention to the new, wonder-working truth. He must be able to be, as it were, absorbed in the vision. He then derives strength from it; he is made a more powerful man. But this capacity for impress is a characteristic gift of childhood.

This, then, was the case with the Apostles. They first appear as children in Scripture, being acted upon, receiving an impress, drawing into their hearts a type and pattern. Our Lord says, "Thou hast hid these

things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." And they have what is a characteristic of children; viz., an extraordinary happiness. They are wholly relieved from the care and responsibility of the sublime mission; that burden is taken off them. He bears it all Who is able to bear the whole of it. He has the whole pressure of the great undertaking, the weight of the leadership. They are without this strain upon their minds, and simply take in the new current of thought and moral conception which has set in. Our Lord Himself reminds them of the privilege they are now enjoying in the happiness which is a part of their condition, and an ordained part of it while He is with them. "Ye shall fast in those days," He says; "there will be enough of trouble for you, enough work for you then: but now it is sunshine and freedom from oppressing thoughts." This is the state of children; their perception, too, was like that of children. When our Lord saw the days of darkness before Him, St. Peter said, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee." * But this is a state at the same time which is producing great effect; it is a great seed-time. This very happiness, this freedom and absence of strain upon them, enabled them all the more to take in the fresh ideas which were flowing in from our Lord's discourse and example. Doubtless it is compared by our Lord Himself to the state of children, but it is the mind of children which even at the time entertains great thought, and sees a future unveiling before it; and the power of reception, the ability to comprehend and em-

* Matt. xvi. 22.

brace the new truths which our Lord's teaching imparted, was all the greater from the peculiar childhood which it was their vocation to go through. All the powers of the fresh opening of life were devoted to the new spring-tide of truth; they fed upon our Lord's manifestations of Himself, and received all His sayings into their hearts, all His renovating words, all that made them, in contrast with the old wisdom of the world, new men.

Thus they came out men of formed and strong character, when the Apostles were all at once by the departure of our Lord thrown back upon themselves, and upon the supernatural guidance of the invisible Spirit;—when upon our Lord's Ascension they were obliged to meet all the difficulties and face the dangers of the gospel cause. This was a crisis to call forth the sublime lessons which their hearts had been learning, and to try the productiveness of that wonderful childhood which had taken so powerful a part in educating them, and had fitted them for the impress of a Divine Mind upon them. Out of this powerful action arose when it was wanted; the Apostles became men, able to see their way amid obstacles, to guide the movement, to encourage the weak, and to give strength to the growing cause. This was the maturity of manhood, but it was the fruit of a previous childhood which had used to its utmost extent the power which childhood has of following a type, submitting to a superior influence, and receiving in fact education. The whole force of the divine mind had penetrated them in consequence of the suitableness of the mind of children

to receive the impress; it had not been interrupted or impaired by weakening influence from old schools. The new wine had not been put into old bottles. It had been a strong education, because it had been a simple one, giving the new ideas of their Master the advantage of all the force of unity. The childhood the Apostles had gone through had been the very instrument of throwing them upon the mind of our Lord. Had they been what is called men at first, they would have been distracted by the schools of the day; as it was, their simplicity as disciples and as babes was the source of their strength and power as men and as leaders.

*SERMON XXXII.*

# The Secret Justice of Temporal Providence.

"*The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*"—REVELATION xx. 12.

THE great characteristic of future judgment is, that it is open judgment—it declares itself. It does not leave the subject of punishment uncertain, so that a man does not know what he is punished for. All is open and plain dealing. We are told the reason of everything. We naturally connect a future judgment with a revelation of sin. The court is an open court; the proceedings are proclaimed, the charges are published, and the dead are judged out of the things that are written in the books. It would seem to be a kind of *Magna Charta* of the next world, that nothing shall be done without making known the grounds on which it is done. It is a transparent world; justice is a public justice, and proclaims its sentence upon the house-tops. The whole congregation of God's creatures is made a witness to it—confirms and ratifies the great work of divine reward and punishment, and stamps the impress of conscience upon it.

But with respect to the justice of this world, as conducted under God's providence, we must make

very large deductions from this openness. I do not mean now the justice of our courts as administered to coarse criminals, which is only a very small part of human justice, but that most important unofficial justice by which people in general have their faults and wrong acts visited upon them, and are made to suffer for them; that justice by which they are placed in different situations in the world, some in higher, some in lower. A considerable part of this distribution is indeed taken out of the hands of justice, and is placed in those of, what men call, chance and fortune, some being favoured by birth, circumstances, and connections, others not; but still a considerable share of the honour and credit, of the happy positions in the world, are taken charge of and distributed by a kind of justice which looks to men's fitness for them. All this belongs to a general system of administration which goes on in the world; and which works in various ways by punishment and reward; visits men's sins upon them, and compensates them for their efforts and exertions. But now with respect to this whole administration of justice. Whatever may be said about the merit of it, and how much good it does, one thing is to be observed, it is not an open justice like that in the courts of heaven; its characteristic is rather closeness. A great deal is done, and carefully done, by it in the world, and it may be said to achieve many most important ends here, and ends which the divine government has in view, but it does not declare itself; it punishes largely and says nothing.

How many persons in the world are punished in fact for their faults in life without knowing that they are

punished for them! or that what they suffer, the actual disadvantage under which they labour, is a punishment for them! Our faults are visited upon us in this world, but we are far from knowing what the sins are which draw down particular judgments upon us. Undoubtedly we can see in some cases in what way a fault of our own has produced real consequences upon ourselves and our situation in the world; but we more often know nothing about the connection, and suffer a penal disadvantage without knowing that it is penal. The penal justice of this visible system of things is so little luminous with respect to itself, indicates so little about itself, and connects the chastisement with the wrong-doing by such oblique channels, that the great mass of our punishments are mute facts. They do not speak, but simply act. They may be called negative punishments. We only know we are under some disadvantage, that we suffer annoyance and discomfort; but all the chain of events which transmits the injurious consequences of some misconduct of our own is for the most part secret to us. People do not tell us, and could not tell us, all they do or say that has reference to ourselves, and affects in some way our standing in life and our relation to others. Perhaps something we have done or said, some very slight thing leaving no record on our memory, has justly offended them, and they speak of us unfavourably in some company. Who can tell how we may not be affected by an opinion thus expressed! Some one may take a prejudice against us, and one able to give form to his wishes. We know nothing of all this, but the penalty pursues us;

though we do not know it, we suffer in consequence of some act or speech of ours. We suffer in fact, and we suffer a punishment more or less, because every suffering is a punishment that is brought upon us by our faults, whether we know it to be such or not. A natural judicial machinery has been brought into action against us, a secret court has sat—secret as far as we know it. Let any one consider what a vast amount of this kind of punishment there must be in the world. Our errors of speech and act are carried everywhere, much more than we are apt to suppose; people say nothing to us when they hear of them, but they note us. He has done such a thing, made some insolent speech, said something malicious, he has a mark placed upon him though he does not know it. Perhaps he is deprived of some advantage which he would have obtained; he suffers some loss from which he would have been free; that is, he is under some infliction, though he is entirely unaware of it. Indeed the world is connected together by such innumerable links that there is no knowing where something ill we have done or said may not find us out, and what train it may not set going to our punishment; not always serious, but gathering force if a man often incurs such consequences, giving a cast and shade to his whole life.

Let us then only consider this negative form of punishment which, without our knowing it, is in reality brought upon us on account of our sins, and we shall see how much retributive justice there is in the world, and reflect with added seriousness on the Divine govern-

ment we are under, thus causing our sin to find us out, though we know it not. It is not less Divine justice because it works in secret. Justice is divine in its concealment when its concealment is part of the Divine plan of the world. It is awful indeed to consider how much is concealed. But we know that God is a hidden God, and that He purposely conceals His plans of action, and allows them to perplex us as enigmas.

How can we tell again (and this is a further reflection) how much we have lost of persons' kindness and good-will, and the fruits of that good-will, the benefits that would have come to us, by faults of our own? This is indeed nothing positive; it is only the absence of something that might have been ours; but we cannot tell how much that might have been. Certainly we know as a trait of human character, and from men's account of themselves, that they are not too contented with their situation in life, and with the circumstances that surround them. They live with the sense of a cloud over them; they have a general idea that things might have been better with them than they are. And why are they not better? You cannot trace the links by which the disadvantages under which you suffer are connected with your faults; but the connection may be closer than you are aware. You complain there is a falling short from what might have been expected. You struggle on; but there is an absence of advantages. The sun does not shine upon you. It is so; but how do you know to what extent you may yourself have cut off the sunshine? How much persons around us,

persons in different stations from our own, have it in their power to bestow in the shape of pleasant feeling, in what comforts and cheers, in praise that elevates! What various forms of good come to us from our fellow-creatures brought in contact with us! what happiness flows from their connection with us! This we are aware of as a familiar truth. How much of this we may have lost by our wilfulness, negligence, indifference, by not caring enough about our neighbour, by selfish habits! We cannot tell how many blessings may have been just breaking upon us, ready to give a happy turn to our lives; but we ourselves have stopped the kindly hand that would have turned the stream upon us. It is impossible we can know how often we have intercepted blessings. I am far from saying that mankind is governed mainly under this dispensation of temporal rewards and punishments; but yet it is evident that these do enter into the system of our government here, and that we thwart, by negligence, bad temper, indolence, insolence, the intentions of God's natural providence for us. We go along with the stream; we follow our humour; we take no pains with our conduct. It cannot be surprising, then, if we have missed countless blessings. Doubtless, did we know our history, which is largely hidden from us, we should find this to be the case to an extent we were not prepared for. The secret causes that have been about our path had a variety of blessings within their compass, if we had only helped them in their operations, or rather if we had not placed gratuitous obstructions in their way. You did not indeed see this

at the time. You went on unconsciously, simply looking to your own convenience for the moment. But though you were unconscious of it, still the exclusion from blessings was going on. It is a characteristic of God's natural providence that He hides His punishments—His positive and, still more, His privative punishments,—His exclusion from blessings and rewards. The man's sin of selfishness, negligence, ill-temper, or whatever else was there, it existed. The sin can employ its instrument, and put an adverse train of events in motion. It can prepare and make ready facts; and when these facts come, if we only knew it, they are as much punishment as if a formal sentence were annexed to them.

But it may be said, "If we do not know through what faults of our own we lose blessings and incur punishments, how are we the wiser? If we were told the particular acts to which they were due, we could then avoid them for the future; but merely to know that they are punishments, and not to know the more relevant point—punishment for what offence—does no good, is of no service whatever. What might have been is mere vague possibility, without notice or warning, without sentence or intimation from God." But the general reflection I am now recommending is not made on the assumption of such a depth of ignorance as is here supposed. We do not know what this or that particular penalty has been due to, this or that unkind, or ungracious, or selfish act; but we do know generally the kind of faults we are prone to, and the risk we run through them. We know, or may know perfectly well

if we please, that these evil habits or qualities tend to alienate good men from us; and their favours and benefits are alone under consideration. Whatever the world's advice or practice, let no one ever seek to recommend himself to other than good men. When you are told to think of how much of life's temporal blessings you may have deprived yourselves, do not think of the worldly and irreligious as dispensers of them. Think of the good, the just, the kind, the well-wishing, from whose aid you shut yourselves out when you contracted selfish habits of mind, and made them think of you with offence and displeasure. It is this source of benefit you have to consider in reflecting what you have deprived yourselves of, what blessings were ready to come to you if you had done your part.

Such reflections must occur to every candid and thoughtful mind. They seem to show the ground on which the system of this world is built, and the large principle of retributive justice which is embodied in its operations. They are considerations to sober and chasten, suggesting much self-condemnation, and deep thought upon life, upon God's government, and the instructive nature of those chastisements which in their particulars have not been disclosed to us. That is a larger and higher principle of punishment indeed, which shows generally what we must avoid, and instils a profound lesson of instruction as it attaches to whole types of faults and whole characters of evil, than one which ever so vividly impresses us by a punishment inflicted for one or other particular wrong act. We must be always on our guard; and so far as this world is

governed upon moral principle, and upon principles of justice, we must walk in caution and in fear.

But it must be seen that this temporal justice, whatever its lessons, does very strikingly contrast with the justice of the eternal courts in this, that it is a close justice. It must occur to us that some persons might have a word to say on the sentence passed thus in secret on them, if they were questioned upon it; for not only the malicious, but the unthinking, who offend by their levities, their carelessness, and their indifference, are punished; but this questioning would be wholly out of place in a justice the peculiar feature of which is that it acts and says nothing. Things are decided in corners, two or three taking advice together. Those who are able to have their way, have it without much noise. The justice which society executes upon its members, or which individuals execute upon one another, is carried on with closed doors; it would lead to great confusion if it was attempted to administer it otherwise. The invisible court of our fellow-creatures which sits behind men's backs, and issues negative punishments, is a true part of providential justice. The will of society upon its members is executed; and that will embodies much which is just, and in the true interests of the community. But we must still see that the justice of this temporal system is defective upon this point. It does a great deal of practical good, it is a necessary kind of justice; but still, that it punishes unheard, and that the offenders under it never know that they are punished, but suffer the evil as a fact without the cause being given them,

is an inferior trait in it. When we compare, then, the inevitable meanness of the justice of the world and of society, its privacy, its cunning, its closeness, and those tendencies to a low type which are part of the very system of things; when we compare this with the open Court of Heaven, the scene to which we turn rises up before us as one full of majesty. There justice does not sit in chambers and whisper into ears, or administer in private and behind curtains. Whatever be the truths which are conveyed in the mysterious emblems of the supreme Court about itself, they certainly signify the frankness and simplicity of final justice. The Books are opened, and the dead are judged out of the things that are written in the Books. All that they have done is before them; they know the charge; it is an open trial. There are no more secret punishments which are felt in fact, but for what offence is never known. Every man knows for what he suffers. And as this scene comes last, so it is intended to stand before us from the first as the great rule of justice, to which all other forms of administering it are passing exceptions. Here we live amidst the privacies and secret management of earthly justice; there we see the type and ideal of Justice; for there God is Judge Himself.

*SERMON XXXIII.*

# Jacob as a Prince Prevailing with God.

"*And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.*"—GENESIS xxxii. 28.

SOME surprise may at first be felt at the term Prince being applied to the patriarch Jacob; for whatever good qualities distinguish his character we hardly regard him as possessing princely ones. He has the quiet virtues, religious and moral, of resignation, meekness, caution; but we hardly attribute to him that spirit and mettle, as we call it, that vigorous temper and fire which we ordinarily associate with the princely character.

And yet when we consider Jacob, we find that he has virtues not so prominently belonging to a humble type as not also to lie at the foundation of the royal and grand form of human character. What patience has he—patience with circumstances, patience with men! With what temper does he bear the long delays in Laban's service!—first one seven years, then another seven years; and that from a simple act of fraud on Laban's part. We feel, as we read the account, how another person would have kicked at the

dishonest dealing, refused to submit to it, and sooner have entangled himself in a whole life of strife than have allowed himself to be the victim of deceit. How do men in their fury at being tricked and cheated break out in wild temper, and throw all life into disorder. But what is Jacob's answer to the difficulty and the imposture? Simply a longer drain upon his stock of patience. He has a store of that effective resource; and having it he uses it. He can wait another term of years; he does wait. What simplicity of action! yet one sees that, as the foundation of a life, this is better, and is more successful, than any outbreak against imposition would have been. He accepts by one meek resolve the fresh yoke, and enters on the new term of service. And when Laban's intolerable treachery attempted yet another robbery, and would have taken from him the fruits even of this second length of service, though it is said "Jacob was wroth," yet with what mildness does he remonstrate, when he does remonstrate. "He chode with Laban; and Jacob answered and said unto Laban, What is my trespass? and what is my sin that thou hast so hotly pursued after me?"* So when Simeon and Levi committed violence, and implicated their father in the peril of a public revenge, which threatened the peace of his whole sojourn in the land, he only said, "Ye have troubled me." He knew the nature of men, the haste with which they act, the haughtiness which exacts vengeance, the little check which even an honest pride can endure, or even thinks it right to endure;—throwing

* Gen. xxxi. 36.

off all restraint and holding it a merit to do so. He bore then with their violent doings. Jacob thus had patience—patience with adverse hindrances, patience with men and their ways. Is not patience a great virtue? By a great virtue I mean the virtue of great men; the virtue of men who have to govern others, who have to guide events. People think that patience is the virtue of the weak, the sufferer, the inferior; of those who are obliged to be patient, knowing they would be the worse off if they were not so. They do not think of it as the appropriate virtue of the great, the strong, and the superior. Yet the great Prime Minister of England at the beginning of the century, who reigns in men's mouths still, was once asked in company what he thought the most important virtue for a prime minister; and his answer was, Patience is the first, Patience is the second, Patience is the third.

Patience is a regal quality then, a princely virtue, and the temper of one who has to govern men, and who receives from God the high calling to take a remarkable part in shaping the course of events in this world. This was Jacob's calling. He had the burden of a long future, the prospects of a sacred nation resting upon him; he had to conduct through the stages of infancy the trembling steps of the prophetic people, whose distant mission bore in its scope the salvation of the world. He could not under the weight of such responsibility afford to deal with men or circumstances as he pleased, simply following his own will, and venting his anger or giving way to provocation as it met

him. He had a burden to bear. The nation that was entrusted to him must be led, and its course controlled, in that early section of its journey in which it depended on him to direct it. Patience therefore was pre-eminently in this case the virtue of a prince. It marked his high commission, his greatness in understanding the designs of God for the sacred people, and through them for the world.

Another point may be observed in Jacob's character. He was not without hope, he looked forward, and with trust and confidence, to the future: he did not despond as regards the main issue, and believed firmly in God's promises. He who does this is necessarily hopeful. His was a religious spirit; the religious mind is sustained by hope. But Jacob's hope was still at the foundation of his mind rather than brought to the surface. Persons are apt to enjoy their hopes too much. Many who have hopes indulge in the present enjoyment of them; they exult in their prospects, think of themselves as rising, and are full of expectation. This is a kind of boasting. Jacob's hope was without this elation; he kept it under great control. It was hope, not suppressed indeed, but still much disciplined, checked, taught stillness and moderation. It was a hope which bore up against a weight of present care and mortification; but it was prevented from rising into enjoyment by that pressure of trouble and care; and was a foundation of strength, rather than any lively emotion for the present. He did not enjoy it, yet he grasped it, felt it underneath him. How differently do people take their hopes even as regards a worldly future! Some are always indulging them, and

manifesting the pleasure of them even loudly: hope is a continual feast to them. Others, on the contrary, reserve their hopes, while still holding them. They keep them as an inner source of strength underneath, not showing them, not exhibiting them to others as a matter of pride. They prefer deferring their time of rejoicing, if they can only sustain their strength so long as they need it. This is the greater and more royal way of entertaining hope, to do without its present gladness and liveliness; using only its support;—its support for higher ends. This is what really great men have to do, who live under the pressure of heavy responsibilities; they cannot let their strength evaporate in mere spirits; they want it for their work. This was Jacob's habit of mind. He held his hope at arm's length, using it to keep up a course of action rather than to enjoy it as an enlivening influence, as gladness of heart. Jacob does not give us the idea of a man of sanguine temper, rather of one who was subject to depression. But hope was still deeper than melancholy in him; it was at the root; it decided action in him; it enabled him to bear the reverses of his journeys and migrations. The whole weight of the charge of God's people lay upon him; but he had a spring of hope at the bottom and underneath this care, which was the stronger from the very circumstance that he did not indulge it for mere pleasure's sake, or expend its resources needlessly; but that it was kept for use. It was reserved for this noblest of all uses—to feed high resolve, and keep up the power of action; it was not wasted in pleasant dreams and high spirits of

the moment. He went on through the different stages of his course, grasping a hope which he yet did not enjoy, and using it all the time that he did not consume it lightly and gratuitously. Hope too much enjoyed is apt to be expended before its time, to waste itself in a mere pleasure of the mind, and to give way to despondency. It was not so with Jacob. By reserving it for great uses, he kept the substance of it entire, and preserved it from falling away. It did not evaporate; but while it was spared mere play and effervescence, the solid strength was cherished and continued to the last. "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord," he says in his last address, when he summed up the purpose of his life. He had waited, but never ceased to hope; the divine reward had been always before him, and he had been inspired by its prospect even throughout his life of care, and under all his burdens.

But it was in prayer specially that Jacob showed his princely character. It was on the occasion of his prayer, when he was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day; it was when the mysterious wrestler said, "Let me go; for the day breaketh," and he was answered, "I will not let thee go, except Thou bless me;" it was then that Jacob was asked, "What is thy name?" and he said, "Jacob," and was answered, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed." What a nobility is attributed to prayer in this episode of Jacob's life! And again, how it reveals a real dignity, a princely characteristic of Jacob's life,

which is concealed in his outer career, amidst his humiliations, distresses, and mortifications! We did not know, as it were, that there was such a princely spirit dwelling among us, who "as a prince had power with God, and had prevailed." What a description of the function of prayer!—what it does, the royal attributes of prayer, that it sets in motion the sovereign agency which settles all human events! Prayer initiates God's government of the world. God permits Himself in His government to be moved by it. He, then, who can pray has indeed under God a princely power attaching to him; he can move Him Who can move all things. This is a way of representing it, addressed to our limited faculties; yet Scripture permits it; and in permitting it, singularly exalts the sovereign act of prayer. Jacob, then, had in the midst of all his worldly sorrows and depressions a religious greatness. As a religious man he was great. You do not see this so clearly while his different trials humble him, and exhibit him as a dejected man before you; as he says to Simeon and Levi, "Ye have troubled me . . . and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house;" as he expresses his fear that mischief will befall Benjamin by the way, which will bring down his gray hairs in sorrow to the grave. But while to human eyes he was a dejected man, in the presence of God he was a prince, and prevailed. Why so? Because his prayer penetrated to God's throne. Thus in the eyes of God Jacob stood high. How many there are who are great

in human eyes who are not great in God's eyes! They have specious and ambitious qualities that lift them up, and give them influence over men: "if a man comes in his own name, him they will receive." But while they have power in the outer court of man's jurisdiction, they have none in the secret world of prayer. God does not attend to them, because He sees them bent on serving themselves, and not Him; and on following their own will, not His will. Thus in the ordering, invisible Providence of God, how are the humble exalted! They are the great of God's kingdom; they have power at His court; they are the Princes of that world, who are listened to when they pray.

All Scripture thus puts true religion before us in the form of a certain greatness, being the one state of mind which has power with God, and therefore the only real power possessed by man. The New Testament has its own form of expressing the greatness of religion. Thus St. John says, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"* Faith is thus presented to us as the quality that overcometh the world; it has a remarkable, great, and royal character attributed to it. Faith has sometimes this marked characteristic of power and greatness assigned to it in connection with a temporary miraculous dispensation, as when it is said, "If ye have faith, ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and it shall be done." But faith has even a higher dignity

* 1 John v. 4, 5.

than this in overcoming the world, in conquering man's evil affections, and giving him that inspiring motive which raises him above the attractions of the world. The Old Testament has also its way of expressing the greatness and spiritual rank of true religion: showing by living examples that prayer is the soul of religion, and that he who prays in earnest has as a prince power with God, and does prevail.

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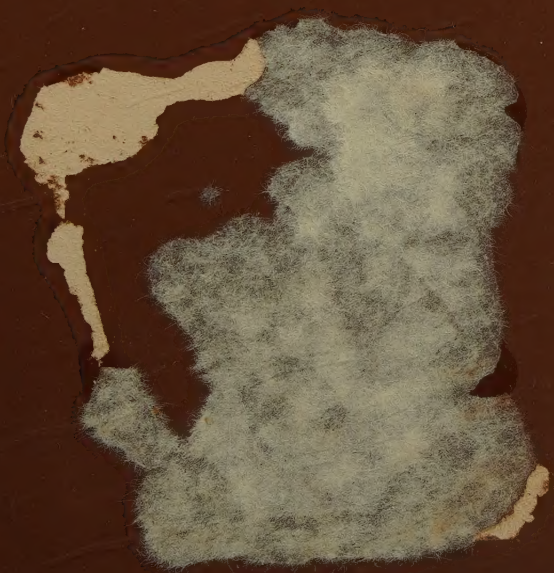
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